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## PRESBYTERIAN HERITAGE





# **PRESBYTERIAN HERITAGE**

**A. Mervyn Davies**

JOHN KNOX PRESS

Richmond, Virginia

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PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

2131(WB)6958

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## Preface

You are a Presbyterian—*Why?*

Why a Presbyterian and not, say, a Baptist, a Methodist, or an Episcopalian?

The question is almost as challenging as, Why a Protestant, and not a Roman Catholic? Or, why a Christian, and not a pagan?

It makes us search deeply into our reasons for believing, for belonging to the Christian faith, and for choosing this denomination in preference to that.

Or, maybe, we have no particular reason for being a Presbyterian at all. Perhaps, the only reason we are one is that we were reared that way in our families; or, maybe, we liked the minister and the service, when we visited First Church; or the Presbyterian Church was closest to our home, and the most convenient to get to.

"When we moved here our next-door neighbors invited us to go with them to church, we had no church home, we liked it, so we joined. . . ." "They were the first to call and invite us. . . ." "They had the best youth group. . . ." "My roommate belonged. . . ."

I remember meeting a service man once who told me he was an Episcopalian because, as he was standing in line for his induction, he overheard the man ahead of him saying he was an Episcopalian.

Our reasons for joining any church group these days may be as many and varied as these. They may range from the best and highest to the purely social, the accidental, the trivial. Probably, most of us today do not have any really strong convictions about any particular church or denomination.

So many of us who are members, nominally at least, really do not know why we *are* Christians, why we *are* Protestants, why we *are* Presbyterians—or Methodists, or Episcopalians, or Baptists, or



whatever it is we happen to be. We cannot, for the life of us, give a reasoned statement for the choice we have made in that important decision we took when we "joined a church."

If we could give a reasoned statement, if we could have convictions about our choice, how much more meaningful our membership would be, how much more effective we would be in the life of the particular group we have joined, how much more we could do for him whom we have accepted as Lord and Savior and promised faithfully to serve!

This book is written for, and dedicated to, all, young and old, who have, for whatever reason, exercised their American freedom of choice in favor of the Presbyterian Church. It is not aimed at proselyting, at making Presbyterians out of members of other churches. It is for those who have already made the decision that has put them in the ranks of the Presbyterians, of whatever branch we choose, "United," or otherwise. It is written with the hope and purpose that they will want to be real, not merely enrolled, Presbyterians.

If you are among those for whom this book is written, you will want to know your church's story. You will want to know who have been its particular saints and heroes, who its founders and fathers, what is its record, good and bad, what have been its triumphs—and defeats. You will want to know what it has stood for, fought for, suffered for, down through the four centuries of its existence. You will want to know what is the heritage of which we become heirs by the very act of becoming members.

It has been well said that all light on our forward path comes from behind—from our past. As Presbyterian Christians as well as Americans, we need that light today as never before.

This book will have served its purpose if, at the end of reading it, you will be able to say, "Now I *know* why I am a Presbyterian."

WILTON, CONNECTICUT

A. MERVYN DAVIES



PART ONE

# THE CONTINENT



## *Chapter I*

# THE REFORMATION COMES TO SWITZERLAND

Shortly after Columbus discovered America, and so brought a new age into existence, Christian men of Europe made a discovery of no less momentous consequence. They rediscovered the church as it had been in the first glorious century of its existence. To all save a very few scholars the Bible containing the record of those events had been an unknown book during the intervening centuries. The invention of printing, followed by the translation of the Scriptures from the original tongues into the languages in current use, brought it out of obscurity and made it available for study.

A revolutionary experience awaited those who embarked on that study. They had their eyes opened to so much that had gone wrong with the church and their religious life. It was shocking to compare the practices of the institutional church of their day with the free, joyous, spontaneous fellowship of Christ's disciples. From that shock came the impulse to put right what was so terribly wrong, which we know in history as the Protestant Reformation.

A few of those who initiated this great revolutionary movement have immortalized themselves so that even the briefest account would be incomplete without a mention of them: John Wycliffe, "morning star of the Reformation," who, in advance of the printed Bible, began to spread its truths among the people of England; William Tyndale, first to translate the entire Bible into English, whose dream it was that every ploughman should have it and read it for himself; John Huss of Bohemia, the first to be martyred as a heretic for his teachings; Erasmus of Rotterdam, the great Renaissance scholar whose translation of the New Testament put the whole movement into high gear; and, of course, most famous of all as a founder of Protestantism, Martin Luther, the German monk

and doctor of theology whose study of the New Testament revealed so plainly God's plan for man's salvation that he could see how appallingly this differed from that being peddled across Europe by the ecclesiastical authorities of his day.

A second wave of Reformers followed hard on the heels of the first, whose vision stretched beyond a reform of the church to take in society as well. More radical in their views they saw the gospel not only as the way of salvation for individuals but as the means by which the Kingdom of God itself could become a reality. For them the Bible was the Word of God, good for statesmen as well as churchmen, containing the only infallible rule of faith and life.

It is with these that our story deals.

#### ZWINGLI

Huldreich Zwingli was a shepherd's son who was born in the high Alps of Switzerland in the year 1484, eight years before Columbus' momentous discovery. Despite his humble origin he became an educated man.

One day a copy of the New Testament fell into his hands, and when he saw what the good news it contained could do for his people in liberating them from superstition and ignorance he felt a call from God to preach. From that day his mission in life was to get the people of his land to read the Scriptures for themselves and discover the road to salvation.

He was just turned 35 when the city of Zürich appointed him the preacher in their great cathedral. Soon his dynamic voice was stirring people to the roots of their being. One enthralled listener said he felt as though he had been lifted up by the hair and suspended in space. Men were yearning for release from the burden of their sins and, when Zwingli told them they could obtain it by simply accepting God's free gift of forgiveness through Jesus Christ, they heard him with inexpressible gladness.

A new spirit and a new life came into that Zürich community. It was as though long-closed doors had been suddenly opened and clean fresh air had come pouring in. Men began to breathe again. Soon old religious beliefs and practices were being discarded. Tested by the new standard of truth, such things as the

supreme authority of the pope, the worship of saints, fasts, pilgrimages, sales of indulgences, belief in purgatory, even the mass, had to go because no warranty could be found for them in Scripture.

The Zwinglian Reformation came to an end when Zwingli, patriot and soldier as well as a preacher, died fighting his city's and the Reformation's foes. His last words on the battlefield, however, were prophetic: "They may kill the body but not the soul."

The soul of the Reformation went marching on. Heinrich Bullinger continued the work in Zürich. Martin Bucer labored in Strasbourg. Basle and Bern came under its influence. And thus, too, it came to Geneva, the birthplace of our church.

A fiery spirit from Auvergne, France, steps into the pioneering role at this point. It needed all Guillaume Farel's burning ardor and invincible determination to convince the stubborn people of Geneva that the Reformation was for them, too. If he had not been, like Zwingli, a dynamic and effective preacher, it is doubtful they would ever have yielded their city even formally to him. And it needed no less fire to prevail upon the reluctant young man he had chosen to help him in the arduous task.

#### THE YOUNG CONVERT FROM FRANCE

John Calvin was 26 when this crucial hour of destiny that led to the birth of our Reformed church struck for him. A book that he had just published brought him to it, for if his name had not already become known in the Protestant movement, Farel would not have gone hotfooting it over to the hostelry where Calvin just happened to be spending the night on his way through the city. The fame of this book, known to the world as *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, preceded its author and determined Farel not to let him get away until he had bowed to his will and agreed to help him.

The book was only a slender volume when it first appeared, a mere six chapters (Calvin later expanded it into a massive book of eighty chapters), but its quality was such that it was immediately greeted as the best statement yet written of the Reformed

faith. Prefacing it was a letter of dedication to the king of France, and if that deluded monarch had heeded its advice he might have been a better ruler, and would certainly have been a juster one. For Calvin's case for the Reformation was so strong, his exposure of the lying charges being brought against Protestants in France so irrefutable, that his majesty could only commit the grossest injustice by treating any of his subjects as heretics.

Calvin was a remarkable young man. He had already been described as the most learned man in Europe, for he had taken his doctorate in both law and theology at the University of Paris, the world's leading seat of learning, before he was 21. His memory in particular was phenomenal, as he was to show by an impromptu performance shortly after coming to Geneva.

The occasion was a formal debate of Reformation principles which was held in Lausanne, between representatives of the respective religions. Calvin was present, and when one of his Romanist opponents misstated the beliefs of the early church fathers, he revealed his erudition as well as amazing memory by being able, for hours on end, to refute everything said, actually quoting the fathers by chapter and verse. It is scarcely surprising that after this stunning performance converts to the new faith were made on the spot. Farel was satisfied he had found the right man for the job.

Calvin's own conversion had been quite recent, and nothing so reveals the intensity and ardor of his nature than the manner of it. He was still deep in his studies at the time, uncertain what his career was going to be, whether in the church or in the law, or perhaps in the then fashionable humanistic studies, when some of Luther's writings came into his hands. Nothing more apparently was needed to make him change direction completely. Almost immediately thereafter, instead of having a splendid future in his own country, as a man of his exceptional gifts assuredly would have had, we find him a fugitive, a member of that hated minority group who already were being done to death because of what were deemed by the ecclesiastical authorities of the day heretical opinions about the church and the Christian religion.

His way of revealing his new self to the world was even more

dramatic. A new rector was being installed in the university and a great assembly of notables was present for the occasion. The day was All Saints Day, traditionally observed with pomp and ceremony. If there was no great curiosity about the inaugural address of the new rector, Nicholas Cop, a young scientist, it was because everybody was prepared for the usual thing, suitable for the day, namely, conventional praises of the saints. But a sensation awaited them. The address was to be unlike any other ever delivered in that abode of ancient and scholastic learning. It was to be a proclamation of the gospel, of Reformed truth.

Calvin had persuaded his friend the new rector, a recent convert like himself, to make this use of the opportunity. "Give the pure Word a chance after centuries of silence," he had pleaded. "Let truth be proclaimed from this pulpit, which is respected by the world of scholars as no other."

The address caused more than a sensation—it caused an explosion of anger and indignation. The rash rector was summoned forthwith to appear before the lawyers of Parliament to answer for his audacity, and even while he was on his way, word reached him that he was going to be seized and hurried off to immediate execution. He turned and fled. The secret of the young men's collaboration then leaked out and Calvin, too, was put in peril of his life. His friends in the university let him down from a back window of his apartment on a rope of bedsheets while the police were thundering at the door to arrest him.

In the intervening years, until he was pulled up short in Geneva, Calvin led the life of a wanderer, never staying long in one place lest he be betrayed. He was still a scholar as he remained all his life. Wherever he went, in Germany, Italy, back at times to his native France, he carried on those prodigious studies which have given him his first claim to immortality in the history of our Western culture.

He completed his *Institutes* at Basel, hometown of the great humanist scholar Erasmus. Then one day he was traveling back from Italy, where he had gone for a visit, making for Strasbourg and the quiet retreat of its fine library, when a detour along his scheduled route brought him to Geneva. The rest is history—the story we are to tell.



## *Chapter II*

# CALVIN AT GENEVA

Calvin had not planned to enter upon a parochial ministry and felt quite unsuited for it. More interested in books than people and temperamentally more at home in a study than a city pulpit, he felt especially unequal to the demands and challenges of such a pastorate as the one he was being thrust into when he reluctantly yielded to Farel's fiery insistence. As he surveyed his future parish, he muttered to himself with uneasy foreboding, "They will not be tolerable to me, nor I to them."

For the Genevese had a reputation that boded ill for any young minister who might be looking for a pleasant, comfortable niche in which to grow his wisdom teeth. To be popular and well liked among them and still remain true to his calling as a minister of the Word of God might be sheer impossibility. Calvin was soon to have to make that hard choice.

The city had been in a continuous state of upheaval and excitement for several years, ever since in fact it had thrown off the allegiance of its overlord the duke of Savoy and its bishop. It had done no more than follow the example of other Swiss communities when it had thrown in its lot with the Reformation. The public ratification of that formal act had taken place a few weeks before Calvin's arrival, on May 21, 1536. It had meant very little so far, the deeper meaning and significance of the Reformation scarcely having begun to penetrate the burghers' consciousness. Certainly, intent on their own affairs, they could not have imagined that by that act they had opened their doors to the greatest change in the life of a city that perhaps had been seen for a thousand years. Their easygoing life of business and pleasure was far too sweet to be given up without a struggle.

A first glance at the city told Calvin that radical measures would be needed if that act of embracing the Reformation was to be anything more than an empty gesture. Sheer chaos prevailed in its religious life. Reformation in Geneva had to be, not renovation of an existing structure, of which there was virtually none, but the construction, from the very foundation upward, of a new church—faith, doctrine, worship, discipline, everything.

This was especially so because Calvin had a lofty vision of the church of God and he proposed to strive mightily to give that vision concrete expression. He began by laying as his first foundation stone the basic principle of our Reformed faith: everything must be grounded in Holy Scripture without any addition from human wisdom. To that end he provided the people with simple tools for their instruction—a catechism and statement of faith.

As this was long before the days when anyone thought church and state should be separate, all ecclesiastical changes had to receive approval by the city government. The Geneva Council approved the changes proposed by its ministers and they became law. But opposition was almost as quick to manifest itself as approval. No sooner was it evident that the ministers' program would touch personal behavior than the extreme sensitivity of the citizens to changes in this area became apparent. A party of opposition began to form; they called themselves the Libertines. They were champions of individual liberty, better described as license.

With parties forming, bitterness and controversy increasing, it was not long before an acutely divided city was giving the many enemies of the Reformation plenty of cause for rejoicing. City elections showed which way the wind of public opinion was blowing when the vote went against the reform party.

The ministers now received jeers as they walked the streets; blasphemies assailed their ears; signs of unpopularity multiplied. The Genevese began to demonstrate that there were as many wolves as sheep in their fold.

With the approach of Easter the Libertines had a chance to destroy Calvin before his work had properly begun. The city

council decreed that the sacrament of the Lord's Supper was to be given to all, regardless of moral conduct. Thus evildoers and blasphemers like the Libertines could not be excluded.

Here Calvin drew the line of what he would accept, of the obedience he would give to the civil power. Outraged by the decree, he flatly refused to obey it, and used the freedom of his pulpit to preach against it. For he may have thought himself timid, but given this kind of an issue, no man could be less so.

An issue was drawn that could not be compromised. The incensed council prohibited Calvin from further preaching, but Calvin ignored the ban. Now the whole city was thrown into tumult. A mob demonstrated outside his door. Shots rang out. Cries were heard: "Kill him—into the Rhone with the traitor." For a moment it looked as though Calvin's ministry would end right there—with his death.

The next day was Easter. Seemingly quite unperturbed by the situation, Calvin appeared as usual in his pulpit and preached with his customary calm. But his enemies had done their work of plotting against him well. The mob was almost out of hand, and the authorities had to intervene to save the preacher's life.

The willful and continued defiance of their authority by the ministers could no longer be tolerated. Farel and his assistant were summoned and given three days to get out of the city and never come back.

#### THE ORDEAL

Banishment provided Calvin with just the opportunity he wanted to resume his journey to Strasbourg, the city of his dreams, where he had lots of friends, and the thought of returning to his studies and writing was a joyous one. Geneva had become "the place of eternal discord" to which he vowed he would never return.

Four very pleasant years were passed in Strasbourg. Calvin went ahead with the *Institutes*, and he got married.\*

\*His marriage was happy, but it did not last long, as illness took his wife within a few years.

Life was shaping up the way he wanted it when a letter came that shattered all his plans. Things had gone very badly in Geneva. The cause of the Reformation was sinking. Soon, it was feared, it would be no more. The letter, which was an official invitation from the city fathers for him and Farel to return, said that without their help the Reformation was doomed.

Farel and Calvin had become indispensable men in the community that kicked them out!

Was the invitation to be accepted? Calvin at first was adamant in rejecting the thought. "There is no place under heaven I am more afraid of," he confided to a friend. But once more, true to that rigorous sense of duty which governed him, he saw that he could not refuse; to do so would be like a sentry deserting his post. The Geneva church was his post of duty; he would rather, he said, venture his life a hundred times than betray her by his desertion.

A honeymoon period marked his return on September 13, 1541. (Farel was not with him having accepted a call to another city.) The city gave him a public welcome. They agreed to the conditions he had laid down as the price of his acceptance. They gave in on the point at issue over communion. They voted him a good salary and bought him a house; they even solemnly professed their determination to keep him always as their pastor. When he proposed a constitution for the church, it was adopted with alacrity and with few amendments. For a while all looked very promising; but his enemies were still on the scene, undiminished in strength, unchanged in their opposition to his program, unrelenting in their determination to defeat him. Nothing, in fact, in his situation was changed, and even before the next winter was over he confessed himself to be nearly worn out by his exertions and vexations and his life had become intolerable.

But one change had taken place—that was in himself. The eagerness and enthusiasm that had agreeably marked him in the first flush of his conversion had given way to a steely, almost sullen mood. He was resolved now to stick it out, grimly determined to fight his enemies, to the death if necessary, and not yield the city to them.

Some of the troubles during the long ordeal that followed he unquestionably brought upon himself. His demands were too extreme, his attitudes too rigid, his temper too inflexible. He seemed incapable of taking a moderate and accommodating course even when common sense as well as prudence pointed in that direction. He met his enemies' opposition head on without compromise.

It may have been the only way to beat them, but the cost to himself was very great. Few men, certainly few ministers of the gospel, have incurred the hostility that was Calvin's during the next fourteen years. This left a mark on him; he became increasingly bitter and rancorous, and his health declined. His diagnosis of his own nature had been right: he was not cut out for the kind of public life that a ministry in Geneva inevitably entailed. He was far too thin-skinned; he suffered too much. The strain was so nearly unendurable that only the conviction that he was obeying his Master—even though he cried out again and again for his discharge—and had his approval for what he did, sustained him and brought him through.

The ordeal ended only when his enemies at last overreached themselves. Calvin, ruthless in his determination finally to rid himself of them, had the leaders arrested and tried for plotting against his life. With the majority of the council on his side, there was no longer a question about who would win this final contest. The entire Libertine party, from their ringleader Ami Perrin down, were sentenced to death for treason. Some were caught and executed; some escaped and fled the city. None ever returned from their banishment. The date was September 1555. Peace at last reigned in the distracted city. (The change indeed was so great that observers thought the devil himself was one of those who had departed.)

Geneva now was Calvin's to command. He had nine years of his life left to finish the work he had begun.

#### A CITY TRANSFORMED

The story of how Geneva was transformed under Calvin's sway has been told many times. As every account makes clear,

it was changed from an easygoing, turbulent community of pleasure-loving folk into a city of sober citizens concerned with religion, international politics, and civic improvement, as well as business. But the causes and circumstances of the transformation have not always been appreciated. If the citizens of Geneva came to think more highly, for instance, of their new university than of their former cabarets, now closed, the reason is worth exploring.

One may say at once that the change was due as much to what was happening around them in Europe as to the deliberate work of their reform-minded pastor, John Calvin.

A terrible civil war was then breaking out; the religious wars which were to deluge a whole continent in blood were beginning. In country after country the suppression of Protestantism was now being stepped up so that every year more and more people were having to seek shelter and safety wherever they could find it.

There were very few countries where the refugees could go. England, France, Spain, Italy, the Netherlands—all were in the same plight: supplying, not receiving refugees. Except for a few free cities, like Frankfort and Strasbourg, the only places of refuge left in Europe were in Switzerland, and Geneva was a principal one.

The Rhone city was a fair sized place as cities went in those days. Its population numbered some 13,000. Yet in one decade alone, *over 5000* people applied for admission. A 40 percent increase of population in ten years!

We know from our own contemporary experience what problems such an influx as this creates for city authorities. The problem of feeding, housing, and clothing the refugees alone must have been tremendous, for most of them arrived, as refugees usually do, penniless. In addition, employment had to be found for them. And, to cap it all, they spoke the diverse languages of Europe, which created a big problem in itself.

Then again, the city had to get quite quickly on to a defense footing. Its life was constantly threatened now by its powerful neighbors beyond the borders of Switzerland. We may think of

Geneva today as a quiet lakeside resort in a neutral land, a kind of sanctuary of peace providing an ideal setting for international organizations dedicated to peace and human progress, like the League of Nations and the Red Cross. But it was not so then! Strategically situated, as it was, it was threatened by the reactionary governments of both France and Spain, aided and abetted by the reviving power of Rome.

One time, during this critical period, it was even proposed that the most famous general of the age, the great duke of Alva, should lead his army of veterans fresh from their killing and ravaging of heretics in the Spanish Netherlands straight to the destruction of this dangerous nest of heretics. Fortunately, the duke declined and the project came to naught.

So, whether the citizenry liked it or not, or whether or not it suited their preferred mode of living, Geneva was becoming the veritable fortress city of the Reformation. Willy-nilly, a transformation of its old *laissez-faire* existence was inevitable.

This background enables us to view more fairly things that Calvin did in the process of exerting an influence far beyond what is normal for a minister of the gospel. For, without holding any political office, without even being admitted to citizenship until near the close of his life, he became after the banishment of his enemies the virtual dictator of the city.

First of all, he cleaned the city up (something even his critics admit was badly needed!). Descriptions of the pre-Calvinist city reveal a cesspool of vice, with social evils, such as prostitution, intolerably prevalent, and theaters notorious for their immorality.

The excessive stringency of the measures employed in this cleanup can be criticized, not their effectiveness. The cleansed air of Geneva is one thing, we can be sure, that gave the citizenry their improved morale; the courage to resist threats and intimidation; above all, the magnificent response that burst from their lips when their former overlord the duke of Savoy came blusteringly demanding their surrender: "For the Sovereignty of God and the Word of God, we will adventure our lives."

This historic affirmation of the burghers of Geneva at a criti-

cal moment of history is one measure of Calvin's achievement. He made heroes out of very ordinary people, something that Calvinism was to do again and again as its influence spread.

As for the refugees, his concern for them was constant. When they arrived penniless, he was generous with his own limited means, even to the point of actual deprivation of himself. He was the kind of Christian who took literally his Lord's command to give away his coat.

But he did not believe in handouts to relieve situations of need; he believed firmly in the benefit of work. So he became particularly active in thinking up schemes for giving employment to these unfortunates. And, as a matter of historical fact, the city owed the expansion of its clothing industry to include silks and velvets, in addition to its woolens, directly to his initiative. Calvin saw that the silk worm, which brought prosperity to neighboring Lyons, might do the same for Geneva.

From industry to sanitation the community felt his improving hand. Nothing seems to have been too minor a matter to receive his personal attention, whether it was increasing the number of municipal latrines, or providing a more efficient night watch, or suggesting the addition of railings to the balconies of houses so that children would be safer, or seeing that the magistrates got after dishonest business practices.

Everything reflected a strong concern for social justice which was one of his most admirable qualities. And social justice of this kind, we need to be reminded, was something rather new in the world. Up to this time, the common people, in particular, had not experienced much of it.

What this adds up to is that under Calvin's sway Geneva became one of the most modern, progressive, civilized cities of the world—one of the first of its kind in fact.

This is a second measure of his achievement, for we are not so accustomed to seeing cities with honest municipal governments, social welfare agencies functioning as they should, efficient police and sanitation, good hospitals, schools and churches, that we can just take them for granted and no longer appreciate how we got them. We need still to affirm the fact that we have



them because of the militant efforts of civic-minded men like the founder of Reformed Christianity.

So it was that people began to come from everywhere to see this Christian community that had sprung up in such an unlikely place.

The refugees, of course, like-minded to Calvin in their idea of what constituted such a community, were delirious with joy. They considered it marvelous beyond description to come into a city where, by all the evidence of their eyes, a holy discipline prevailed, where vice did not flaunt itself in their faces as they walked its streets, and where dissolute pleasure could no longer be counted a chief attraction.

It goes without saying that the new citizens were as ecstatic in their praise of the changes as the former residents, the now exiled Libertines, were bitter in their detestation.

Three contemporary tributes to the new Geneva vividly convey this enthusiasm:

The first is that of its former pastor, Guillaume Farel. He wrote: "I would rather be the last in Geneva than the first elsewhere."

The second comes from a man of whom we shall shortly be hearing much more. As a refugee from England just in time to witness the expulsion of the Libertines, and after looking the place over and noting all that was being done for Christian nurture and for Christian living, John Knox wrote to an English friend, ecstatically declaring it to be the most perfect school of Christ that ever was on earth since the days of the Apostles.

The third visitor was particularly struck by the way people from all countries had come there as into a sanctuary, not to amass wealth but to live in poverty as brothers and sisters in Christ.

"Is it not wonderful," wrote John Bale, bishop of Ossory in Ireland, "that Spaniards, Italians, Scots, Englishmen, Frenchmen, Germans, disagreeing in manners, speech and apparel, sheep and wolves, bulls and bears, being coupled with the only yoke of Christ, should live so lovingly and friendly, and that monks, laymen and nuns, disagreeing both in life and sect,

should dwell together, like a spiritual and Christian congregation."\*

#### THE BURNING OF SERVETUS

It was an age of savage cruelty, bitter intolerance, merciless persecutions, wholesale slaughters. Little or no regard was paid to the sanctity of human life. A few people only escaped the contagion of bloodshed and rose above its inhumane spirit. It is in this perspective that we should view Calvin's tragic involvement during the period of his ordeal in the celebrated case of Michael Servetus. For if a man is to be judged by history, he should be judged in terms of his age and not by standards of a later one.

Because Calvin's enemies and critics have made so much of this case, using it to smear his reputation, distorting and often completely perverting the facts to suit their purpose, we cannot pass it over in silence, even though it has no real place in our story and is a painful subject to dwell on.

Michael Servetus was a Spanish physician and writer of some distinction. He was also a notorious heretic who had been condemned to death at the stake by the Inquisition but had managed to escape. In October 1553, while Calvin was in the middle of his mortal conflict with the Libertines, Servetus appeared in Geneva, placing Calvin in a terrible dilemma. If he allowed this notorious heretic to escape without paying the penalty for his crime—Servetus' denial of the doctrine of the Trinity made him a public menace in the eyes of that generation—Calvin would have exposed himself to a deadly thrust by his enemies. He himself, however, was no religious persecutor; no Catholic died for his faith in his Geneva. He abhorred the burnings that were polluting the air of Europe and had several times intervened to save from that fate persons who could have been labeled as heretics because of their unorthodox beliefs. But Servetus was, in Calvin's eyes, in a different category from these. Servetus' guilt was blatant and gross; it could not be mini-

\* We do not usually associate monks and nuns with Calvin's Geneva—which suggests a much more tolerant and ecumenical community than he has generally been given credit for.

mized; he could not be allowed to escape. So Servetus was arrested, tried, and condemned to death, and Calvin was his prosecutor, not only approving his execution but demanding it. The act for Calvin was clearly one of political expedience.

His enemies and critics have usually erred, however, in their statement of the facts at this point. Calvin did not "burn Servetus" as has been stated so often. Though he stepped out of his proper role as minister of the gospel to act as prosecutor, he was yet no magistrate; he had no power to sentence anyone; and at that particular juncture he did not even have the influence that came later. The sentence of burning was imposed by the court, who denied Calvin's plea for a more merciful death by the sword.

So Michael Servetus went to the stake on October 27, 1553. A few of Calvin's friends deplored the act at the time, for more tolerant and humane ideas were spreading. Many more praised it as necessary. The other Swiss churches strongly approved, and Farel even went so far as to reproach his former assistant bitterly for what he considered an ill-timed and ill-placed plea for mercy.

It was, as we have said, an exceptionally cruel age with very little humanity visible in its actions.

Down through the ages since, there has been an ever growing tolerance so that today there is no difference of opinion: we all heartily deplore what was done and detest the spirit that produced the prosecution.

A few years ago some friends and admirers of Calvin felt this so strongly that they had to do something about it. So, on the four-hundredth anniversary of the grim tragedy, they erected a monument to it on the spot where it was enacted, the field of Champel outside the city.

In this tangible way they sought to expiate the guilt of the man they loved and revered as the founder of their church.

### *Chapter III*

## SOURCE OF OUR FREEDOM

Life was regimented in Calvin's Geneva; the discipline harsh, the rule more suited to a monastery than to a business community. The punishments for violations were excessive. None of this can be denied, nor need be minimized. At the same time this fact must also be affirmed no less emphatically: as a plain matter of history, we can trace our democratic freedom to what happened in Geneva as result of this one man Calvin's amazing influence and, most of all, we trace it to the discipline of life stemming from it.

For this is where our attention must center at this point: Calvin came on the scene of history when the civilization of the Middle Ages was breaking down. With serfs in the process of becoming men, feudalism collapsing, a new order was about to be instituted. The question still to be decided was: Whose will was to be obeyed with the new freedom that was coming to Western man? Was it to be the will of absolute monarchs? Or was it to be a higher Will?

Some nations were to succumb to the new monster of absolute monarchy as it prowled the earth during the next two centuries, with tragic results. But some did not. And the ones that did not were the ones whose combined efforts gave our Western man a new birth of freedom, here in our own hemisphere. And one reason historians can give why certain nations succumbed to this monster and others did not is that those who did not had the aid of the inner strengthening that came to them through the conversion of enough of their people to the faith of Calvinism.

We have special need of this emphasis today when our tendency is to despise and scoff at discipline. The hard fact of his-

tory is that wherever this highly disciplined Reformed faith took hold, surviving the desperate attempts made by rulers to suppress it, there—in Scotland, England, and Holland especially—we can trace, as to a fountainhead, the chief source of our American freedom.

The only name we really have for this idea ("democracy" is utterly inadequate) is "Freedom Under God"—the freedom, that is, of morally disciplined, socially and politically responsible citizens, who can take, and who insist upon taking, the government of their communities and nations upon themselves, resisting to the death all who would deprive them of it.

#### REFORMATION ON THE MARCH

Calvin's influence spread far beyond the narrow bounds of his Swiss city. The achievement which gave him his great place in history was coextensive with the Reformation itself. Few things are more certain than that without John Calvin the Reformation would have collapsed or, at best, it would have been confined within the Germanic lands that Martin Luther had conquered for it, with the help of the German princes.

Before Calvin took command, Protestantism was unorganized, divided, confused. There was nothing to hold it together save a common belief in the Bible and the common stigma of heresy that Rome had attached to it. Calvin brought to the task of leadership incomparable powers of organization as well as resources of vast learning. By carrying on a ceaseless correspondence with leaders in every country and writing voluminously to formulate and define Reformed doctrine, he achieved a common mind with them. The result was a church with branches spreading out across western Europe, firmly united by a common faith and creed, a common order of government, a common mode of worship.

Without this new unity and the strength of conviction and commitment that Calvin gave it, it is hard to see how Protestantism outside Germany could have survived the fury of suppression and persecution that a reinvigorated Rome was about to unleash against it. Even as it was, with Calvinists arrayed against

papists, the counteroffensive, spearheaded by the newly founded Society of Jesus, more familiarly known as Jesuits, came so close to total victory that only pockets of freedom remained in Europe.

This gives another measure of Calvin's greatness. He saw the importance of education and indoctrination and of providing for a trained leadership to carry on his work.

#### THE GENEVA ACADEMY

What Calvin did for education ranks in history second only to his reform of the church. It was not so much that he insisted on an educated clergy as that he saw the need for an educated laity as well. This was new, this was revolutionary. Without this principle being implanted in the heart of our culture there could be no freedom, no democracy; one of the most essential ingredients of world community would be missing.

Calvin believed firmly in the principle of universal education and to his influence can be traced the beginning of compulsory public schools. There were four elementary schools for boys in his Geneva, besides another for girls. It was, however, on providing an institution for higher studies that he really set his heart.

No greater monument to one man's dream—greater in its influence—has ever been built than the Geneva Academy, which grew into the world famous University of Geneva, for it is the grand alma mater of all liberal arts colleges in America! The story of how Calvin planned it, how he raised the funds, and how he chose its first rector and got its faculty together is a story in itself, and a thrilling one.

Every teacher was handpicked and every one had to be of top quality. Theodore Beza was the first rector; Calvin had found him in the neighboring city of Lausanne and he, like the other professors, was a distinguished scholar.

The school, which was in existence before the building, opened with an enrollment of 162, chiefly boys from France, but this number was multiplied by ten in a very few years and, so great was its instant fame, it attracted students from all over Europe, rivaling Paris and the Sorbonne.

The aims Calvin set this institution have been the principles

that have guided the founders of our colleges for three centuries: "To secure political administration, to sustain the church unharmed and to maintain humanity among men." Church and commonwealth alike were to be served by the graduates of these colleges which sprang up in soil fertilized by Calvin's influence and example.

The first effect of this educational zeal was, of course, in Geneva itself, where attendance at lectures became compulsory for all citizens. It was not long before a generation of Genevese arose to assist rather than obstruct the new orientation which Calvin was giving to the life of their city.

He had refused the presidency of his own school, not feeling that he had the necessary qualifications, but he had been, in effect, a professor of theology from the beginning of his work in Geneva. The fame of his lectures alone drew many students to Geneva. He was recognized as the foremost biblical interpreter of his day.

Among these visitors, sitting at Calvin's feet for three years, was the aforesaid refugee from Scotland, John Knox—an especially notable fact because what Knox learned there formed the chief link between our Presbyterianism and the Reformed churches of the Continent.

Thus it was that Geneva became the training center for Protestantism—a school, a seminary, a church, a fortress of faith. In the adverse circumstances of the time, this made it a virtual cradle of liberty itself, and revolution began to march when these ideas and the men inspired by them made their influence felt beyond the narrow confines of that city-republic.

#### CHURCHES UNDER THE CROSS: THE NETHERLANDS

1559 is a date to be remembered. For the story we are telling, it was a year of great historic events. John Calvin published in that year the definitive edition of his *Institutes*; John Knox left Geneva and landed in Scotland, touching off the chain of events that produced our Presbyterian Church; the French organized their Reformed Church and adopted a confession of faith and discipline modeled on Calvin's teachings; Philip of Spain made

his fateful resolve to extirpate heresy from his dominions; and William of Orange, misleadingly named "the Silent," reached his equally fateful resolve to drive "the Spanish vermin" from the Netherlands. Each one of these events had momentous consequences.

The beginning of the Spanish Inquisition's bloody work and the arrival of missionaries from Geneva occurred in the Netherlands simultaneously. From the first, reformation of the church teamed up with resistance to tyranny. William the Silent became a Calvinist not because he was converted by any truth of doctrine but because he recognized as a grim fact that only the militant, fearless spirit which Calvinism generated could provide the motive power for the revolt. Calvinism alone could save the nation. That was one fact written in blood in our faith's first title deed.

The historian Motley reached this verdict: "for the [Dutch] Provinces," he said, "to have encountered Spain and Rome without Calvinism and relying on municipal enthusiasms only, would have been to throw away the sword and fight with the scabbard."\*

Within a few years of the Geneva missionaries' arrival, congregations were being organized; there were enough of them by 1566 to form a synod. Five years later a national church was formed, based on the representative principle of government which Calvin implanted.

But the war for independence dominated the entire scene, as the boldness and ardor of the Reformed sparked the rebellion. Open-air services were held under armed guard of volunteers. The worshipers provided William of Orange with the backbone of his army. Sermons prepared men for battle, and psalm-singing men marched into battle.

The winning of Dutch independence in 1581 was an event comparable in historic importance to our own 1776. The victory achieved was for the Calvinistic principle that princes and rulers are appointed by God to be shepherds of their people and their subjects have a God-given right to depose tyrants through their elected representatives.

\* John Lothrop Motley, *Life and Death of John Barneveldt*, Vol. 1, 331.



## FRANCE

In France seven years intervened between the time the first Geneva-trained missionaries entered the country and the bloody suppression of their work. Over a hundred dedicated men infiltrated the country in that time. Spreading like an underground fire, producing as it did so a network of cells and congregations, the movement's adherents were soon so numerous that they dared at last to appear in public. At the first synod meeting in Paris fifty congregations numbering 300,000 members were represented. Following that historic public assembly, the number of churches quickly swelled to two thousand.

No wonder Calvin, watching anxiously from across the border for every scrap of news from his native land, exulted in the hope that his biggest dream, its conversion, was about to be realized! For the moment he dared hope that the historic triumphs of Paul and Barnabas in the Roman Empire were going to be repeated. The infection of truth had spread even to the royal court of France, where the king's sister Margaret had caught it. Many nobles of repute, including princes of the blood royal, like Condé, were lining up on its side. The cause had found a first-rate leader in Gaspard de Coligny, the Admiral of France.

Calvin ardently believed that knowledge of the truth would suffice of itself to work the miracle. He asked only that his missionaries be given freedom to preach the Word. But that was exactly what they were not to have. The French authorities, bitterly hostile, were alert to the danger. One by one the missionaries were caught and put to death.

Francis I was no Constantine the Great; no decree making the Reformed faith the official religion of France came from him. Rather, he and his successors on the throne all went the other way.

If there had been some way in which the change over of religions could have been effected constitutionally, by popular vote or parliamentary action, France might have become Protestant. But France was already well on its way to becoming a totalitarian state. Its rulers had already taken the path that led to that

fearful event of 1572, the massacre of St. Bartholomew, when they decided that the Inquisition, choosing its victims one by one, was too slow and inefficient to do the job that needed to be done and turned to mass slaughter instead.

What defeated the movement in France was the theory on which the state rested: one law, one faith, one king. This unity of faith, involving that of church, was to be maintained by as much force and terror as necessary. This, even more than the intolerance of Rome toward those whom it regarded as heretics, sealed the fate of the Huguenots,\* for the Roman Church in France did not itself have the power to suppress a movement of this great strength. But this made no difference; for if the Church of Rome did not have the power, the state did; and the Huguenots, heretics in the eyes of the Roman Church, were no less subversives in the eyes of the state. And they were particularly dangerous subversives, for their idea of representative government, and the democratic centralization that marked their organization under Calvin at Geneva, did, without any question at all, threaten the structure of authority in French society.

And so it was that the French Reformation, so brilliant in its dawning, became just another of history's might-have-beens—perhaps, because of all that it could have done for France, the most poignant might-have-been of all.

Calvin died on May 27, 1564. Only 55, he had utterly worn himself out by his herculean efforts, and his health had long been shattered. His Christian spirit was never more evident than at the close of his tempestuous life when he summoned the members of the city council and his fellow pastors to his bedside and told them with humble contrition how his sins had always displeased him, how the fear of God had always been in his heart.

\*How the French Protestants got this name has never been decided. One theory is that it came from the Swiss word *Eidgenossen* ("confederates"), but several other theories exist.

The whole city mourned his passing. The city council in special session solemnly declared that God had marked him with a character of singular majesty.

Calvin's greatness is a fact of history. He is one of the shining figures of the Christian faith. When he spoke of himself as having yielded his soul chained and bound unto obedience to God, we have seen how this was literally true. His very rejection, in early manhood, of the easy road through life, deliberately taking what was for him the way of the cross, makes him a true hero of the faith. How much personal bitterness, suffering, bloodguilt, hostility, hatred, he would have avoided if he had but gone as he had planned into that quiet retreat and buried himself in his books!



PART TWO

**BRITAIN**



## *Chapter IV*

# REVOLUTION IN SCOTLAND

Few years have opened as gloomily as 1560. The cause of freedom, represented by the Protestant Reformation, seemed hopelessly lost. Martin Luther had died in good time, before his dream of a spiritual rebirth for Christian men vanished in a welter of war and political intrigue. Calvin was approaching his death-bed, broken in body, wounded in spirit. He had lived long enough to see his dream of a Reformed France bloodily torn to shreds. A new pope in Rome was busily marshaling the forces of a revived and militant Catholicism to win back his lost territories. The carnage that Erasmus had foreseen as the inevitable consequence of revolt was about to start. Where were the dreams and visions of the Reformers now? Would their martyrdoms all be in vain?

Only one little gleam of light shone in the darkness that New Year's Day. It came not from one of the rich cultural centers of the world, not from Paris or Florence, not from Antwerp or London, or from one of the large and powerful nations—England, France, Italy, Spain. The gleam of light came from one of the smallest and most backward countries, from a land fully 400 years behind the rest of Europe in political and social development. Events to decide the fate of the Reformation and determine the faith of countless unborn millions, even in as yet undiscovered lands, were occurring in a lowly, weak, and wretched country on the periphery of civilization itself—Scotland.

The poverty and misery of sixteenth-century Scotland can best be compared to what we know of conditions still existing in many parts of Latin America. For generations the strife-torn northern land had known no settled government. It had few re-

sources; its land was poor. No middle class stood between a rapacious nobility and downtrodden peasants. Again and again, for centuries, the country had been overrun and ravaged by English armies. The flower of its chivalry had been slain on the dreadful field of Flodden. A whole generation of leadership had been wiped out on that most fatal day! And since then, a grim triad of faction, feud, and force had ruled the hapless land. Nor had the Scots the help of the one body they should have been able to count on—the church was among their worst oppressors. Catholic as well as Protestant writers agree that the Scottish Church was in a most degraded state.\*

Its hierarchy was as corrupt as any in Europe. It has been said that the only discernible difference between the bishops and abbots, on the one hand, and the earls and barons, on the other, was that one set of nobles could have legitimate heirs, the other could not! The lower clergy were notoriously illiterate, immoral, and scandalously neglectful of their work. The monastic orders were demoralized and had lost their sense of vocation. Abuses in the church were indeed so plentiful and widespread that even the most fervid apologist for the church has had difficulty finding exceptions to the general rule of corruption. Half the wealth of the kingdom was in its hands. The feeble attempts at reform had all failed. The crown, the ecclesiastical authorities, even the papacy, betrayed these efforts for the sake of power, money, or other booty. No wonder the entire institution was held in contempt. The wits of Scotland had long been making it the favorite butt of their lampoons and satires.

Truly it could be said that here was a land ripe, ready, waiting for revolution.

This provides the explanation of why the light that gleamed in that New Year's darkness of 1560 should have come from this direction. Nowhere else, a noted historian has said, was there a seed-plot better prepared for revolutionary ideas of a religious sort. Nowhere else would "an intelligible Bible be a newer book,

\* The latest study from the Roman Catholic side, *Essays on the Scottish Reformation, 1513-1625*, edited by David McRoberts (Glasgow: Burns, 1962), fully confirms this statement.

or a sermon kindle stranger fires. Nowhere else would the pious champions of the Catholic faith be compelled to say so much that was evil of those who should have been their pastors.”\*

Nowhere else was Reformed truth so clearly, so emphatically, so urgently, the answer to a nation's ills as in Scotland.

#### JOHN KNOX

“Wherefore was Master Patrick burnt?”

The question echoed and re-echoed through Scotland. Why was that fine young man, Patrick Hamilton, only 25, of royal blood, spotless reputation, and blameless piety, put to the cruellest death that the wit of man could devise—a slow death of burning at the stake? What foul crime had he committed?

The answer came back: For heresy, nothing more. He had studied on the Continent; he had embraced Reformed ideas; he had carried the truth of the gospel home to his people; merely by so doing he had become a menace to the established order.

In burning young Master Patrick's body, the Church of Rome had really set fire to its own edifice. “The reek of Patrick Hamilton,” Knox was to record in his *History of the Reformation*, “infected all it blew upon.”

That was thirty years before the revolt began. In the meantime another martyrdom brought the doom of the greedy, power-ridden structure, which still, blasphemously, called itself a church, still closer. On March 1, 1546, George Wishart, Greek New Testament scholar, disciple of Calvin, able expounder of the Word, and devoted pastor to the poor and needy, met the fate that was by now becoming all too common for those who were effectively creating demand for reform. In the public square of St. Andrews, the nation's religious capital, Wishart was burned.

This was the hinge on which Scottish history turned, because a man who was serving as Wishart's bodyguard, seeking to protect him from his enemies with an ancient two-handed sword, was a small, hitherto unheard-of priest named John Knox.

\* *Selected Historical Essays of F. W. Maitland* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1962), p. 156.



In the night that Wishart was betrayed to his enemies, his bodyguard, like a certain Simon Peter before him, would have drawn his sword; only his friend gently took it from him, saying: "One life is enough for a sacrifice. Gang back to your bairns, Maister Knox, and God bless you!"

That moment sealed the fate of the Roman Church in Scotland. No deadlier, doughtier foe was it ever to have than this man whom history knows as "plain Mister Knox."

Nothing is known of his background except that he was of the common people. Even his birthdate is uncertain.\* He was educated well enough to be a priest and a tutor of noblemen's sons. He made his debut in history when he was about 34.

A few weeks after the martyrdom of Wishart, the man responsible for his death, Cardinal Beaton, was assassinated in the castle of St. Andrews by a group of avengers. Mary of Guise, the queen regent, moved to put down the incipient revolt. She besieged the rebels in the castle. Among their number was Knox, who had taken refuge there along with the two boys whom he was tutoring. The garrison found itself in need of a chaplain and turned to him. He could not refuse though he must have known that the post would make him a marked man.

His bitterest experience came when the castle fell to the French allies of the queen regent and he found himself carried off captive. Sentenced to the galleys as a prisoner of war, Knox spent nineteen months chained to the oar like a slave. Both his physical toughness and his faith received here their most grueling test. He survived unbroken in spirit, strengthened in purpose. Perhaps there now exploded within him that final rocket that thrust him soaring on his destined track through history.

His hell-ship was called the *Notre Dame*. Daily the chained slaves were forced to hear masses sung in the Lady's honor and flogging was their punishment if they refused to bow their heads.

Flogging must have been almost a daily experience for John Knox, for he proudly wrote in his history, "They could never make the poorest of the company [meaning himself] give reverence to that idol."

This completed his education into the nature of the Roman

\* The most probable date is 1513, the year of Flodden.

Church. He now had a consuming hatred for it. He became one of God's angry men to whom the pope was anti-Christ, Satan's man, head of a pagan religion masquerading as the church of Jesus Christ. In the name of his Lord and all that was true, just, and decent, he swore himself to its destruction.

When English aid gained his release he came to England. Well received in that now Protestant country, he was sent to serve parishes in the north, but his powerful preaching soon attracted attention and he was called down to London to become chaplain to the boy-king Edward VI. His preaching before the court gained him the king's confidence, and Knox became the royal adviser in religious affairs, helping materially to shape the Anglican Church during that brief Reformation dawn. He was even offered a bishopric, but this he declined.

Mary Tudor's accession—Bloody Mary as she has ever since been known—brought on that terrible period when so many were burned at the stake for their faith, and hundreds, including John Knox, being clearly marked for burning, fled for their lives to the Continent.

Knox first went to Frankfurt in Germany, ministered for a while to its congregation of English refugees, then joined Calvin and a large English colony at Geneva. Here together the English congregation, whose minister Knox became, translated the Bible; and their excellent translation, known as the Geneva Bible, was the one that preceded the King James Version in official use in all English churches.

Now Knox had reached his final stage of preparation for the work of reform waiting for him in his native land. He never doubted that that time would come—even as a galley slave. He tells in his history of the day when, chained to his oar, he looked out of the porthole and saw a familiar sight—the church steeples of St. Andrews! On being asked if he knew where he was, he replied, "Yes, I know it well, for I see the steeple of that place where God first opened my mouth in public to His glory; and I am fully persuaded, how weak so-ever I appear, that I shall not depart this life till that my tongue shall glorify His godly name in the same place."

That moment was at hand. He left Geneva, carrying with him

a blueprint for the reform of the church of his beloved land. After a weary period of waiting at Dieppe, the time appeared ripe at last for the venture. He landed in Scotland on May 2, 1559, and the cry went out across the moors, "John Knox is come!"

#### A NATION SET FREE

Revolution is scarcely a word we ordinarily associate with Presbyterian ministers, but in the case of the one that swept Scotland out of the Middle Ages into our own era, we have to make an exception.

Revolt was stirring before its destined leader arrived on the scene. A group of nobles had formed themselves into a party with the high-sounding name of "The Lords of the Congregation of Jesus Christ," but it is most unlikely that anything would have come of their efforts without the nation's Prophet to give the movement direction and drive. He alone had what it takes to bring triumph to a hopeless cause—the unfaltering faith and courage, the refusal to surrender, or even compromise, in the face of desperate odds.

What transformed futile insurrection into successful revolution was the power of his preaching. It was dynamic. Enemies called him a rabble-rouser. When the English ambassador heard him, he reported to Queen Elizabeth, "This man's voice can put more life into his hearers than five hundred trumpets."

Which was precisely what happened. As soon as the word of his coming went out across the nation, the government put a price on his life. As he began his preaching mission to arouse the nation, his greatest need, he said, was a faster horse! Without delay he reached Perth, where he found a packed congregation awaiting him. After he had denounced the lies, deceit, and idolatry of Rome with his customary vehemence, the people went home for their dinner. As they mulled over his words, a priest in the church began to say mass; a boy objected; the priest boxed his ears; and that was enough to set off the first riot.

Although Knox did not approve of rioting and called the mob the "rascal multitude," this response to his preaching was natural and inevitable, as has been shown in many lands under similar conditions.

Before the day was over, every image, relic, and stained glass window in the church had been destroyed; every convent in Perth had been sacked. By the testimony of Knox's enemies and critics, this, followed by similar riots in other cities as Knox moved across the land, meant the destruction of Scotland's artistic heritage—which may be true—but for the poor and often starving people of Scotland the day's work meant that from the contents of the sacked monasteries they could for the first time in their lives fill their empty bellies and cover their naked bodies.

The proverbial fat was now in the fire. The queen regent discarded conciliatory pretense. Summoning her army she marched on Perth vowing to destroy it—sow it with salt were her actual words—and so with one blow make an end of the heretics. As she had 18,000 troops, with a good stiffening of French, and the unready Lords of the Congregation had at that moment none at all, there was every prospect she would make good her vow.

For Knox the prophet, however, this situation only gave the Lord a chance to show which side he was on. In the ensuing panic only Knox remained calm. He collected the frightened people together to give them a word of courage and hope, then dispatched messengers at top speed to summon back to the fight those who had despaired and dispersed. Meanwhile he played for time, using words for weapons as he waited for arms. He appealed to those of his own countrymen who had remained true to the old religion to hear him before condemning him, and he also appealed to the queen regent's Frenchmen, many of whom had Huguenot leanings.

We are accustomed in these days of powerful propaganda to wars that are won by words alone. Knox was, perhaps, the first to wage such a war.

His strategy paid off. A Reformed congregation in Ayrshire got the message, quickly armed itself, and by forced marches got to Perth in time. When the vacillating regent, undisposed to push matters to extremes, arrived before the gates of the city, she thought better of her vow and resumed negotiations.

But all the effective talking was now being done by Knox. Going from success to success he fulfilled his own prophecy by having the intense satisfaction of preaching at St. Andrews.

Here his audacity was almost too great. He preached his sermon under the very nose of the regent, Mary and her faithful Frenchmen being only 12 miles away!

Filled with rage she moved at once to seize him. And now the Lord for the second time could demonstrate his power, for the Lords of the Congregation were again caught napping.

This time, Knox recorded in his history, "God did so multiply our number that it appeared as men had rained from the clouds."

The nation at last was aroused, which was all that was needed to overthrow the weakly buttressed power of the French queen. Eight weeks after landing, Knox entered Edinburgh, the capital, in triumph with the army of the Congregation, now 6000 strong. The country had been taken with scarcely a shot fired, or a life taken. It ranks uniquely in history as a bloodless revolution.

Sunday, July 1, 1559, saw Knox, still an outlaw, preaching his first sermon in the capital. As he mounted the lofty pulpit of St. Giles' Cathedral Church, only a stone's throw from the royal palace at Holyrood and right under the shadow of the great castle rock, it must have been an unforgettable day for all.

But the struggle was not yet over. Mary of Guise still had an ace in her hand: she was looking for the help that she knew was on its way, from her own country. If the powerful French armada reached her in time, she knew she would have no trouble disposing of the rebels.

Intervention by England was also expected. But tradition clearly called for the English to be received as enemies and the French as friends and deliverers. Obviously, if this was to be the story again, nothing would save the Congregation and its untrained levies.

But it was not to be the story again. Tradition was in the process of being destroyed along with the moribund church. A new factor had within these past weeks come into the equation—Scottish patriotism. Weak as it was, an undisciplined mob rather than a law-abiding people, it was strong enough to upset the balance. Scotland's whole future rested on this single issue of whether the aroused nation would declare for the traditional

ally or the traditional enemy. The fact that the ally was Catholic and the enemy now Protestant was what determined the historic choice of the Scots, for they themselves were on the side of the Reformation.

There was an excruciating moment of suspense. The French armada was momentarily expected—and nothing had yet been heard from England. Mary was jubilant as Knox was forced to flee to take refuge again in St. Andrews. "Where is now John Knox his God?" she cried. "My God is stronger than his." She pursued her enemy to the castle walls waiting to seize him the moment the French fleet delivered him into her hands.

Was history about to repeat itself? Would the sails that had been sighted prove to be French? Or would they this time be English?

They were English! The French armada had been wrecked in a storm. The hesitant, cautious Elizabeth had acted in time. Knox believed that the Lord had again intervened to save his prophet.

The day was January 22 in the year that had, everywhere else in Europe, opened so darkly for the cause of freedom.

A few weeks later an English army crossed the border, to be received as friends. Mary of Guise, knowing at last that the game was up, retired to her castle in Edinburgh, where shortly afterward she died.

July 6, 1560, became Scotland's independence day, for on that day the treaty of Edinburgh was signed providing for the restoration to power of the national Estates—all that the nation had in the way of a Parliament—and the evacuation of foreign troops from its soil. Scotland was free at last.

## *Chapter V*

# THE SCOTTISH REFORMATION

The revolution was effected with immoderate haste and dubious legality.\* After receiving Knox's draft proposals, one day was all the time the Estates took to consider and pass the necessary legislation. The abolition of the pope's authority, the outlawing of the mass, the condemnation of all doctrine and practice contrary to Knox's confession of faith, were accomplished in a single day. Seldom has a nation been put upon a new course with less forethought by its lawmakers.

It was not a thorough job. One almost criminal omission was of any financial provision for the new church. This was a blow to the heart of Knox's dream for his country. As he had learned in Geneva, the key to any program of lasting reform must lie in education; the people needed to be indoctrinated as soon as possible in the principles of the Reformed faith. To this end Knox had planned to set aside one-third of the confiscated property of the old church for the endowment of the new and, most especially, for a system of national education.

It was a magnificent scheme, and if it had been adopted it would have at once given Scotland the finest school system in the world, centuries ahead of other countries. But it never stood a chance; Scotland's greedy nobles had quite other ideas of what they wanted to do with all that wealth. And so the national settlement of religion emerged as one which declared the new faith and church official—outlawing the old on pain of death if the

\*Laws needed the royal assent, but the Scottish throne was vacant. Mary Stuart on her accession would not give this assent. It was not until after her abdication that the matter could be attended to, the royal assent being then given to the legislation by the hand of the Regent Murray acting for the infant James VI.

mass were even so much as celebrated—yet provided no money for maintenance, which scarcely made sense any way you look at it.

It was enough to break the Prophet's heart. For he, a watchman over the entire realm, had been dreaming a great dream of a truly new nation. A God-controlled and reformed church was only to be the means to achieving a greater end, a God-controlled people.

Anxiety was added to disappointment to temper jubilation over the recent triumph. The international thread on which the Reformation hung was a slender one; it would be broken if anything happened to Elizabeth I of England. Her help was needed to protect Scotland's back door against invasion from Catholic France, if not from Spain as well, which was always a threat.

It was unfortunate that Knox could not count on Elizabeth's personal goodwill. Never as now did he have so much cause to rue the publication of his famous pamphlet "The First Blast of the Trumpet against the Monstrous Regiment of Women." Directed against women rulers like those two terrible Marys, Mary Tudor of England and Mary Guise of Scotland, it had been fairly aimed at the time of its writing in Geneva, even though Calvin had advised against its publication. But it had actually come off the press just in time to greet Queen Elizabeth, and there is just no knowing how much offense it caused in that proud breast!

Knox's greatest anxiety concerned what would happen when Mary Stuart, now of age, returned to claim her throne. Everyone knew that Mary was a Catholic and a very devout one, brought up in a French family noted for its fanatical hatred of Huguenots. Wouldn't she, as queen of Scotland, be a virtual agent of Rome's Counter Reformation and try to restore the old order just as soon as she could?

Knox had no doubt about the answer to that question. His anxiety about the outcome of such an attempt would have been less if he could count on some solid support, but he could not. The nobles? Their loyalties were like their principles—fluid as water. A beautiful young woman on the throne would soon have



them forgetting what they had fought for so recently, especially as at best they were pretty hazy about its meaning.

The people? That was different of course. They would be on his side—up to a point. But the people were as yet little more than the mob whose only conspicuous part in the late revolution had been the sacking of churches and the destruction of images. The people would be fickle and unreliable until they had been educated. The new Scotland was not created in a day.

And so the nation waited in continued uneasy suspense.

Meanwhile the new church held its first general assembly. It was attended by exactly six ministers and thirty-six elders. This was a nearly full attendance, the total number of ministers serving the more than one thousand parishes of Scotland being twelve, some say only eight. Twelve ministers, one thousand parishes! The Reformation indeed hung by a thread. It depended in fact, as it had from the start, on a single man of tremendous faith, courage, and determination. One might even say that the fate not only of Scotland but of the whole world, and particularly the fate of our nation still to be born, rested on the shoulders of this one man, John Knox.

#### THE DUEL

On August 19, 1561, Mary Queen of Scots landed from France.

For Knox it was a day of mourning. Even the sky seemed to him to reflect heaven's grief over the event: "The sun was not seen to shine two days before nor two days after. That forewarning God gave us."

Four days later mass was celebrated in the private chapel of the queen's palace.

This meant by the law just passed that a capital offense had been committed in Scotland. Knox was confirmed in his worst fears. No time must be lost in sounding the tocsin of alarm to the nation. The queen had come without an army, it was true—and a French army had been greatly feared—but, "One mass is worse for Scotland than a hostile army." So the next Sunday he mounted his pulpit at St. Giles and solemnly denounced the royal defiance of the law.

The queen sent a summons to him. She thought that she could deal most effectively with this opponent if she had him before her. And so began one of the most remarkable series of interviews between sovereign and subject in all history.

The contrasts between them were as striking as you could find in literature. She was 18, beautiful, radiant, regal, her dress the latest Paris creation, herself the product of the most polished and elegant court in Europe. He was a man now in his middle years, prematurely old, plainly clad as usual, dour, grim faced, as he looked upon the woman whom he likened to Jezebel, the consort of King Ahab, and totally without that humbleness of demeanor which royalty has always demanded from subjects.

This last is easily explained for John Knox, like a character out of the Old Testament, considered himself the spokesman and subject of a far greater monarch, the Lord of Hosts.

Mary thought she could win him over simply by employing her abundant charm, even as she already was doing with her nobles in the brief time since her arrival. But her failure was at once so complete as to reduce her to tears. She could not at first realize that she was dealing with a man who was impervious to all such blandishments.

So when she accused him of inciting the people of her realm to adopt a religion other than the one ordained and reminded him that God had commanded subjects to obey their princes, his reply was a calm "Not in matters of religion, Madam, there the command is for the people to obey God." When she asked the pointed question, "Do you think it lawful then, for subjects to resist their princes?" he was at no loss for a reply: "If their princes exceed their bounds, Madam, there is no doubt but they may be resisted."

"Well then," cried Mary, beginning to lose her temper, "I perceive that my subjects shall obey you and not me, and shall do what they like and not what I command; and so I must be subject to them and not they to me."

With a calm that must in itself have been infuriating to the queen, Knox replied: "God forbid, Madam, that ever I take upon me to command anyone to obey me, or yet set subjects at

liberty to do what pleases them. But my aim is that both princes and subjects obey God."

This was his opportunity to preach the Word to the young woman seated in front of him, and he seized it in characteristic style, proving in a somewhat involved manner that the queen's subjection to God and the church was most fitting, honorable, and glorious.

The queen drily reminded him here that the church for her was not his but the Church of Rome.

But nothing could stop him. A stream of invective against her church poured from his mouth. She must be weaned from her enslavement to "the Roman harlot"; she must submit to the plainly revealed Word of God.

"My conscience does not say so."

"Conscience, Madam, requires knowledge, and I fear that right knowledge you have none."

"But I have both heard and read."

"So, Madam, did the Jews that crucified Christ Jesus; they read both the Law and the Prophets and heard the same interpreted after their manner. Have you heard any but such as the pope and his cardinals have allowed? And you may be sure that such will be speaking nothing to offend their own estates!"

"You interpret the Scriptures in one manner and they another. Whom shall I believe? And who shall be judge?"

Triumphantly he cried, "You shall believe only God—the God that speaketh plainly in his Word, and further than the Word teaches you shall not believe."

"So say you."

And with this lame conclusion the queen ended a most unpleasant and unproductive interview.

Others followed, five in all, all equally disagreeable, all ending in mutual frustration. They could agree on nothing; there was no way either could win over the other. The queen tried flattery; she tried intimidation. Neither had any more effect on this man than his kind of bludgeoning evangelism had on her.

The final audience was precipitated when the Prophet had the audacity to preach a sermon denouncing a marriage she was pro-

posing for herself. To make matters worse he had, for maximum effect, preached it before Parliament.

Knox's concern here was the queen's proposal to marry a Roman Catholic. He only had to remember what happened in England when Mary Tudor married the king of Spain to be completely sure of his ground as the mouthpiece of his country's interests.

Mary this time received him with a flood of tears. She was weeping so uncontrollably that it was several minutes before she was able to compose herself enough to speak to him. Finally, she blurted out the question, "What have you to do with my marriage?"

To that she added a question that revealed the cause of her deepest hurt: "What are ye within this Commonwealth?"

How could he, a man of common birth, presume to censure anything she, the queen, did?

His immortal reply came like a flash and in it was packed all the natural pride of Scottish birth: "A subject born within the same, Madam!"

He continued: "... yet has God made me (how abject that ever I be in your eyes) a profitable member within the same. Yea, Madam, to me it appertains no less to forewarn of such things as may hurt it, if I foresee them, than it does to any of the nobility: for both my vocation and conscience crave plainness of me."

He then repeated his objection to her marrying an infidel husband and denounced the nobles of the realm if they consented to it: it would be to betray Christ and the country's freedom.

Once more the queen dissolved in tears and Knox had to wait patiently until her weeping subsided. To her accusation of unfeeling cruelty, he replied:

"Madam, in God's presence I speak: I never delighted in the weeping of any of God's creatures: Yea, I can scarcely well abide the tears of my own boys whom my own hand corrects; much less can I rejoice in your Majesty's weeping. But seeing that I have offered unto you no just occasion to be offended, but have spoken the truth, as my vocation craves of me, I must sustain (albeit unwillingly) your Majesty's tears, rather than I dare hurt my conscience or betray my Commonwealth, through my silence."

After this final interview he noticed that all the ladies-in-waiting

in the outer chamber were cutting him dead, as though even acknowledgment of his existence would cost them their places at court. He stopped and looked at them, clad as they were in all their finery. His powerful voice rang out as he bade them farewell for the last time:

"O fair ladies, how pleasing were this life of yours, if it should ever abide, and then in the end that we might pass to heaven with all this gay gear! But fie upon that knave Death, that will come whether we will or not! And when he has laid on his arrest, the foul worms will be busy with this flesh, be it never so fair and so tender; and the silly soul I fear shall be so feeble, that it can neither carry with it gold, garnishing, pearl, nor precious stones."

#### THE ACHIEVEMENT

The duel was over and it was pretty much of a draw. Mary reigned from her palace, having by now brought most of the nobles over to her side. Knox exercised his sway from his pulpit up the street at St. Giles. He still had the people on his side. And it was not very long before the queen's own folly—her alleged complicity in the murder of Darnley, her husband, her marriage to his murderer, the Earl of Bothwell—brought an abrupt end to her reign, and any hopes she had of restoring the ancient religion.

So the victory in the end was his. In nothing was it more clear-cut or decisive for the future of Scotland than his assertion of the right of the church to hold its general assemblies whether or not the queen withheld her assent. "Take from us," he passionately cried, "the liberty of assemblies and you take from us the gospel."

No more essential victory for religious liberty was ever to be won than this.

Yet the last ten years of his life—he died on November 24, 1572—were marked by cruel disillusionment. The politicians had forsaken him, having gone over to the queen, and the parting had been bitter. He had kept his control over the commons—his only hope of saving the Reformation—but he had done so only by keeping them constantly stirred up, adding to his already considerable reputation as a rabble-rouser. What Knox had hoped for, what he had worked so hard for, was a national government and a Re-

formed church working together, hand in hand, for the betterment of the whole nation. (His concern extended to the poor, and he had plans for the establishment of hospitals as well as schools.) But all he saw accomplished in his lifetime was a church so ill provided for, so starved for support, that its future was still problematical when he died.

Yet John Knox's achievement was imperishable. Despite his own fierce intolerance, he had given the world an example of a revolution carried out without cruelty or bloodshed. He had given the Bible as an open book to his people, and with it a key to its understanding and practical guidance for its study. He had faithfully followed Calvin in basing his Reformation upon supreme authority of Scripture. In all this he had given his people a strong and sure foundation on which to build a new and united nation.

## *Chapter VI*

# A NATION OF CALVINISTS

A remarkable change took place in Scotland in the years following the Reformation. A new nation emerged, with a new spirit, a new outlook, a new unity, a new strength that did not come just from its material resources, which were unchanged. We can claim this change as the firstfruits of Calvinism, for when the Scots accepted the Reformation they did so with a whole heart.

If Calvinism had been only a set of dogmatic beliefs, it never would have produced this transformation in the character of a people.

Before leaving Geneva, Knox had addressed a letter to the Commons of Scotland which, far better than any words of our own, shows the inner spirit that governed this great change—the basic democracy that gave a place to everyone, high and low, lay and clerical, so that in a sense, and of course not completely, the whole nation became integrated into the church as the church became integrated into the life of the nation.

The Prophet wrote to his people: "Neither would I that ye should esteem the reformation and care of religion less to appertain to you, because ye are no kings, rulers, judges, nobles nor in authority. Beloved brothers, ye are God's creatures, created and formed to his own image and similitude: for whose redemption was shed the most precious blood of the only beloved Son of God: to whom he hath commanded his Gospel and glad tidings to be preached; and for whom he hath prepared the heavenly inheritance. . . .

"And this is the point wherein I say, All men are equal . . . And this is that equality which is between the kings and subjects the most rich and noble, and betwixt the poorest and men of low estate; to wit, that as the one is obliged to believe in heart, and with

the mouth to confess the Lord Jesus to be the only Saviour of the world, so is the other.”\*

Calvinism built itself into the national life by means of two very distinctive parts of the system: its discipline and its education. Both in a diluted form are still part of our Presbyterian heritage.

One of the first measures of the Reformers after the revolution was the adoption by Parliament of a Book of Discipline, or as we would call it, a Book of Church Order. In this was set forth most precise rules of conduct. The church courts were given jurisdiction to punish such varied sins as drunkenness, wearing of excessive finery, fornication, oppression of the poor by means of exactions, wanton and licentious speech.

The chief function of elders sitting as a session in each local church was to act as judicial officers punishing such offenses, with excommunication reserved for the worst.

In theory, the system was intended to be democratic as everything else in the new Scotland was intended to be. Of course, human nature being as it is, this was not the way things always worked out in practice!

Knox's scheme for a system of national education was, as we have seen, rejected, but a less ambitious system was set up which put Scotland well ahead of other nations for a matter of two centuries. It called for each parish in the towns to provide a schoolmaster to teach grammar and Latin. In the villages the minister himself was to be the dominie, giving instruction in the rudiments and the Catechism. In the larger cities grammar schools were established. And topping the pyramid, were the universities, the three ancient ones of St. Andrews, Glasgow, and Aberdeen and a new one in Edinburgh.

The democratic aspect of the system was the provision of aid for those who needed it, rich men's sons being expected to pay their own way. The best students, regardless of their circumstances, were expected to go to the top so that church and commonwealth might be served to the very best ability of all Scotland's sons.

This combined system of national education and discipline produced in the course of two centuries a people noted for indus-

\* Elizabeth Whitley, *Plain Mr. Knox* (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1960), p. 91.



try and enterprise, for thrift, honesty, and respect for the truth; perhaps most especially, for independence of mind and spirit—like that which characterized the national poet, Robert Burns—strength of conscientious conviction, such as Scottish Presbyterians have always been noted for; and loyalty to whatever cause, good, lost, or indifferent, that Scotland's sons and daughters have embraced in each generation. "Whatever its other faults," says the great English historian G. M. Trevelyan, "the Church of John Knox raised the downtrodden people of Scotland to look its feudal masters in the face."\*

#### JAMES VERSUS MELVILLE

James—VI of Scotland, I of England—has been nicknamed the wisest fool in Christendom. The name has stuck but in his handling of the ticklish church problem he was perhaps more wise than foolish. The folly he left to his son and heir, Charles I.

The Scots tried to make a Presbyterian out of him, but they conspicuously failed. As he grew to manhood he came to realize the truth in his cousin Elizabeth's view. The queen of England wrote to warn him that there had arisen in both of their realms a dangerous sect that would have no kings but a presbytery.

Elizabeth had put her finger on the spot where Presbyterianism and monarchy would disagree, and dangerously so. How could divine-right monarchs and divine-right presbyters cohabit the same realm?

As soon as James, an ambitious young man, took the reins of government in his own hands, there was the making of conflict, and that conflict became a certainty as soon as the Church of Scotland found a champion worthy to wear the shoes of John Knox. Such a champion it found in Andrew Melville.

Melville too had learned his Presbyterianism at its Genevan source, but he had disagreed with his master, on one important point: he thought Presbyterianism meant no bishops, and that was not Calvin's thought.

Not everyone in Scotland agreed with Melville on this point. In fact, the General Assembly, already a far more representative body

\* G. M. Trevelyan, *English Social History* (London: Longmans, Green, 1942), p. 442.

than the antiquated feudal Estates, approached the matter by trying to define what a bishop is and came to the reasonable conclusion that the office belongs to all who are appointed to take charge of a flock. In other words, all parish ministers are, in effect, bishops. So it adopted a second book of discipline which declared bishops, pastors, and ministers to be equivalent terms, each being set apart only after lawful election and assent of the people.

The government's idea at first was that bishops were primarily needed to collect the revenues for the crown that had lapsed after the Reformation, but when it tried appointing such officials the Scots laughed them out of existence, calling them "tulchan bishops." "Tulchan" is Gaelic for a stuffed calfskin used to induce a mother cow to yield her milk!

When James took the reins of government, he went out of his way to challenge the church, and Melville in particular, by announcing he was assuming the spiritual sword as well as the temporal. He was, that is, declaring himself the head of the church.

It was a gauntlet thrown down, and Melville and his supporters quickly picked it up. Their protest was strongly worded. "Who dares subscribe to these treasonable articles?" asked the earl of Arran speaking for the king.

"We do," answered the commissioners to assembly, and to record the fact they put their names to the document in question.

The time had not come when the royal will could be resisted in this way. A subservient Parliament put matters right by making such resistance high treason and restoring episcopacy to the realm. Melville had to leave the country.

The opposition continued even in his absence, which showed that change in the national temper was already taking effect. James, more a realist in statecraft than his luckless son, bowed to it, agreeing to recognize and confirm the rights of the church. This did not, however, mean that he had surrendered his aim of restoring the royal authority.

The issue was joined again over the freedom of church assemblies to meet without the royal permission. Melville, back again from exile for a brief while, collided head on with the king on this issue.

If any Presbyterian has been plain spoken it was Andrew Mel-

ville. His attitude of disrespect to royalty rivaled even John Knox's. "You are not the head of the Church," he flatly told James. "King James is the subject of King Jesus." He actually took him by the sleeve and called him "God's silly vassal"!

Even allowing for the fact that "silly" did not then mean "stupid" but only "feeble," this was still quite a Presbyterian mouthful and it highly incensed the king. He came to the definite conclusion, influencing all his future policy, that Presbyterianism agreed as well with monarchy as God with the devil!

The last word in this struggle was James's. Melville went back into exile, where he ended his life, and the king, using expedient bribery and other persuasions as needed, put through the Assembly the kind of settlement that would at least assure peace in his troublesome northern kingdom and leave his authority intact.

He did not force an intolerable settlement, wisely left the parish organization of sessions of ministers and elders intact, but he did make them accept episcopacy, together with a form of worship to conform with that of the Church of England. Furthermore, in his selection of bishops he was careful not to pick men who would offend the already sensitive Presbyterian susceptibilities of the Scots.

Episcopacy and Presbyterianism would not have gone to war if this compromise had remained in force.

#### CHARLES I VERSUS SCOTLAND

Nobody questions Charles I's piety, or his devotion to his church. He did no more than what he deemed right when he enforced a policy of rigid conformity to the ritual and liturgy of High Anglicanism. All one questions is his wisdom and interpretation of kingly duty. The effect was to cause the great Puritan exodus that led to the founding of Massachusetts, and then, when he extended his policy to his Scottish kingdom, the precipitation of a war that he could not win.

He proceeded step by step to his own defeat. First, he appointed bishops who would lend themselves to such a policy of uniformity. A Book of Canons was then substituted for the Book of Discipline. Finally, the king ordered the Scots to use a new Prayer Book.

Again, nobody questions that this book contained a beautiful and dignified liturgy. It was simply that in introducing it the king had not seen fit to consult his Scottish subjects. The book came with the royal command for its use already stamped upon it, and this was not the way Scots of the fourth generation since Knox liked to have matters so intimately affecting their religious life decided for them. It looked suspiciously like an assault not only on their religion but on their independence.

The King's Council in Edinburgh smelled trouble immediately and sent back a warning. But the headstrong king could not be prevented from blundering onward. He fixed July 23, 1637, as the day for the formal introduction of the new order of worship throughout the country.

On that day the king's councillors went in solemn procession to St. Giles for the morning worship, though two of them were apprehensive of what might occur and absented themselves. No sooner was the service begun than the worshipers set up a shout, and shortly, led by Jenny Geddes, who immortalized herself by the act, they were hurling their folding stools and clasp Bibles at the heads of the unfortunate dean and councillors. The riot was soon stopped; the rioters ejected; and the service proceeded to its conclusion. But it was found that the same thing had occurred in other cities, and a deliberate organized plot against the royal decree was suspected.

Charles was furious, as he always was when the crime of *lèse majesté* had been committed. In stubborn blindness he mistook the demonstration of popular feeling for the lawless acts of a mere rabble and ordered the continued use of the Prayer Book with the arrest and punishment of the rioters.

The order only gave more incitement to rebellion. With the king firmly set on his collision course and refusing to heed either supplications from the Scots or the advice of his council, conflict was inevitable.

So came the day, Wednesday, February 28, 1638, when the Scots performed what they ever after referred to as the marriage of their nation with God, the signing of the National Covenant.

This great document of Scottish history, which is also a part of our Presbyterian heritage, was a restatement of the Confession of

1581, which the boy-king James had signed. Its closing paragraph was a vow to maintain the faith :

“From the knowledge and conscience of our duty to God, to our King and Country, without any worldly respect or inducement, we promise and swear by the great name of the Lord our God, to continue in the profession and obedience of the aforesaid religion; that we shall defend the same and resist all those contrary errors and corruptions according to our vocation, and to the utmost of that power that God hath put into our hands, all the days of our life.”

The leaders of the revolt met in Greyfriars Church to sign the document. Prominent among them were the Reverend Alexander Henderson, who preached the sermon, an honest man with a large heart; and Archibald Johnston, laird of Warriston, a layman and a fanatic. After these two had read and signed it, the assembled lords and gentlemen filed up and did the same. The following day the lesser gentry and ministers signed; Friday it was the turn of the common folk, who overflowed the little church into the churchyard. Then across the land, as copies reached them, in town kirk and village kirk, the men of Scotland put their names, or their marks, to the Covenant.

Scotland had given its reply to the king, and nothing like it had ever been seen before. A united nation had arisen in a new kind of strength, signing a solemn and sacred bond to resist to the death the misguided policy of its king.

## *Chapter VII*

# THE STRUGGLE FOR ENGLAND

The Reformation followed a different course in England, where, circumstances being vastly different, political and social conditions far better, no interregnum provided the Reformers with the exceptional opportunity they had had in Scotland. Even so, Presbyterianism twice came within hailing distance of its goal of being accepted as the national religion. The first defeat was imposed by Elizabeth; the second, nearly a century later, was at the hand of Oliver Cromwell.

It says much for the strength of our faith that but for these encounters with two of the most powerful figures in English history it might have prevailed in England as it had in Holland and Scotland. And it is interesting to note the opposite ground of each ruler's hostility: for the dictatorial queen, Presbyterianism represented too great a threat to her royal authority; for the dictatorial soldier, it ran counter to his advanced ideas of religious liberty.

Presbyterianism from the first occupied middle ground between the two extremes of too much government and too little. This hostility of extremists at both ends of the political spectrum is profoundly significant of our church's role in history and culture.

### ENGLAND SUPPLIES THE NAME

At Elizabeth's accession, following the bloody reign of Mary, the leaders of Reform came hurrying home from their various places of refuge on the Continent, bringing with them Presbyterian ideas.

At first, the new queen spoke fair words to them; she accepted at their hands an English Bible, the newly published Geneva version, the work of John Knox and his friends. But very soon their

hopes were dashed. More than personal dislike of Knox, more than pique and wounded vanity, caused Elizabeth to set her face strongly against Reform. She was Henry VIII's daughter and, along with the crown, she had inherited his determination to make the royal authority supreme in church and state.

The Reform leaders took seriously the affirmation of their confession of faith: "There is no other head of the Church but the Lord Jesus Christ," and therefore for them the royal claim of supremacy was blasphemous and its assertion a usurpation. They could not see how the church could be properly governed except by its own representatives, acting in the name of that divine head.

To the queen any proposal of self-government in church or state was equally anathema. She had inherited the old order of hierarchy—bishops appointed like other officials by the Crown and responsive to its wishes—and she was not going to change a system so ideal for her purpose.

The issue was joined on this point of authority. Some Reformers—those known as Puritans—were most concerned with the worship of the church; they wanted to get rid of ceremonial and ritual and bring the purified services closer to the people's level, in accord with the New Testament and the teaching of Calvin.

Others, more radical in their views, centered their attention on government, repudiating, in particular, bishops; they became known as Presbyterians. In this way our church got its name, in contrast to the more comprehensive, and in some ways more accurate, name of Reformed, which it retained on the Continent.

The battle was hard fought from the first. The Presbyterian influence in the Church of England was strong. On one occasion no fewer than 500 of its clergy publicly declared their position. In the House of Commons support was no less strong. With free elections the Presbyterians might have won control early in Elizabeth's reign.

For the moment, however, the queen's arm of suppression was too strong. Peter Wentworth was a valiant fighter for civil liberty, who not only questioned on the floor of the House of Commons the royal claim of supremacy but asserted Parliament's right to debate the question. Three times he was sent to prison. The Presbyte-

rians' leader, Thomas Cartwright, a brilliant man, was deprived of his professorship of divinity at Cambridge, jailed, and finally exiled.

Elizabeth's fear of Presbyterianism was great. Like most dictators, she was afraid of popular discussion and she banned religious meetings, even in private homes. But here she ran into some real opposition. Among the protesters was no less than the primate of the church himself, the Archbishop of Canterbury. When Edmund Grindal received the order, he made the fine reply: "Bear with me I beseech you, Madam, if I choose rather to offend your earthly Majesty than to offend the Heavenly Majesty of God." Such assertion of the rights of conscience only landed people in the Tower.

Popular sentiment swung the queen's way at the time of the Spanish Armada. A great burst of patriotism swept the country in its moment of danger, and it became bad for any idea that did not bear plainly stamped upon it the label "Made in England." Presbyterianism's label clearly was "Made in Geneva." Furthermore, it was being mediated to England through England's despised and traditional foe, Scotland. What could be worse! Reform went out of style for the remainder of Good Queen Bess's reign.

#### ENGLAND SUPPLIES THE STANDARDS

The name "Westminster" bulks large in our church. Many cities have a Westminster Church. Our Confession, Catechism, youth fellowship, all bear the name. Clearly it is a favorite one. But the reason for this is not so apparent. If "Westminster" were a Scottish, not an English, place name, the connection would be clearer. The explanation is bound up with our story. For one brief moment in history Presbyterianism was actually England's official religion, and from that moment of opportunity came the standards by which our church is governed.

It happened in this manner. Charles I brought the whole religious issue in England, as in Scotland, to the boiling point. While many Puritans were being driven into exile, the majority stayed at home to contest the issue there. When the showdown came, they demonstrated their strength by controlling Parliament as well as the city of London.



In the second year of England's civil war, the Presbyterian-controlled Parliament summoned an assembly to meet in Westminster Abbey to begin the task of reforming the church. The stated aim was to bring the Church of England into full accord with the Word of God and into closer harmony with the Church of Scotland and other Reformed churches abroad.

The first meeting of this Westminster Assembly took place on July 1, 1643, and it remained in active session for the next five and a half years, meeting 1163 times. After that, informal meetings continued for yet another three years. From these lengthy deliberations came the legislation which gave our church its standards of faith and order.

The Westminster Assembly was not free as General Assemblies are. Its activities were supervised by the body that had called it into being, Parliament. More than half of its 302 members were nominees or direct representatives of Parliament. Only 121 were described as "learned, godly and judicious divines." But there was a singular unity of mind and heart among them all. Parliament would not accept the finished work until it was satisfied that every statement in the Confession was thoroughly documented from Scripture.

It was a remarkable conference in every way. Every man on entering had to make solemn avowal of his intention to hold to the truth in sincerity and maintain nothing but what he believed to be in agreement with the Word of God and would redound to God's glory and the peace of his church. Within this restriction there was freedom of speech.

The assembled divines and theologians examined the many creeds and confessions that had already been written, with particular attention to those of John Calvin and John Knox, so determined were they to reach a result that would be acceptable to Christians everywhere.

Two statements in the documents have special importance. One is the affirmation of Christian liberty in the Confession: "God alone is Lord of the conscience." This has been the watchword of those who believe that truth cannot be fixed or confined but is ever growing, ever expanding with new knowledge. The other is the

opening sentence of the Shorter Catechism: "Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever." It seems important that we never forget that injunction, *enjoy*!

#### DECLINE AND FALL

The rest of this chapter is necessarily anticlimactic, but lessons can be learned from the fate that overcame Presbyterianism in England.

With religion inseparable from politics, the work of the Westminster Assembly got entangled with the war, and as its fortunes began to go against Parliament, the help of the Scots was solicited. The Scots made their aid conditional on a general signing of a Solemn League and Covenant, pledging everybody to maintain the Reformed religion in England and Scotland. The pledge could only be carried out in England by purging the church of clergy who were wedded to Anglicanism. This meant that the same Covenant that had been an instrument of freedom defending Scottish independence now became an instrument of oppression threatening English liberty, and the party of Independents, whose leader was Oliver Cromwell, would have none of it. It was now that John Milton coined the memorable phrase putting the Independents' objection to seventeenth-century Presbyterianism in a nutshell: "New presbyter is but old priest writ large."

Cromwell, bestriding the English scene like a colossus, ended Presbyterian rule with one blow of the mailed fist. One of his army colonels named Pride entered the sacred precincts of the House of Commons with a file of soldiers, drove out every one of its Presbyterian members and reduced its size by one-half, making it ever after known as the Rump Parliament. Cromwell then overthrew the Scots on the battlefield and emerged as sole ruler of the three kingdoms of England, Scotland, and Ireland.

The short reign of Presbyterianism in England was at an end.

Our English church never recovered from the setback. At the end of the Commonwealth period of military rule, our people inevitably suffered most from the general reaction against Puritanism that had set in even before the restoration of the monarchy. All efforts toward a reasonable settlement of the church, which

would have satisfied moderate leaders like Richard Baxter, were defeated. Their enemies, the High Anglicans, were in control. Charles II, for his part, flippantly dismissed Presbyterianism with a jest as a religion not fit for gentlemen, and certainly it ceased from that time being an English gentleman's religion.

Persecution of the harshest kind became the order of the day. With the famous Clarendon Code the Anglicans paid off many old scores, which had included the cutting off of Archbishop Laud's head. Only those ministers who had received ordination at the hands of a bishop were any longer permitted to officiate in the Church of England; the Covenants had to be renounced, the Book of Common Prayer accepted. An Act of Uniformity eliminated 2400 clergy at one stroke, this being the number of ministers in the Church of England who refused to surrender their Presbyterian convictions. But their enemies were not satisfied with driving Presbyterians out of the national church—they had to be expelled from the national life as well; so they were debarred from holding public office, and the universities and professions were closed to them. The only avenues left to them, as Dissenters, were in business and commerce.

These repressive measures forced Presbyterianism to become virtually an underground movement, without legal rights of any kind. As an organized church, for a century it virtually ceased to exist. When it was reborn, it was as an offshoot of Scotland, ministering chiefly to Scots who had crossed the border, and it is a comparatively small church still.

## *Chapter VIII*

# A COLONY IN IRELAND

While the struggles in England and Scotland were holding the spotlight, there was a development in another part of the British Isles that has particular importance in our Presbyterian story.

We associate James I's reign with two things in particular: the King James Version of the Bible, and the beginning of English colonization in America. But to these Presbyterians add a third: the plantation of Ulster. All three were essential to our history. The first gave us the Book which has been the foundation of our faith. The second provided what was to be, and still is, our chief home—the North American continent. The third produced the men and women who, more than any other land, peopled that home. Figure out the order of importance of these three developments, which occurred virtually simultaneously!

While Sir Walter Raleigh and Captain John Smith were making the first settlement in Virginia, the king and his advisers were trying to solve the pesky Irish problem. Ireland was already a long-time problem for the English, as they tried to extend their rule over all the British Isles. Like Scotland and Wales, it was inhabited by people of different race and culture, but, unlike those other Celtic countries, of a different religion as well. What made the Irish problem especially acute is that the Reformation had not spread to Ireland. Rather, the Irish remained staunchly Catholic.

The problem was nearly insoluble, but the English still thought they had a surefire solution: colonization. The theory was that by planting some of their own people in the island they would be able gradually to anglicize the country, and when that was done, everything would be nice and peaceful. The Gaels, for their part in the settlement, would surely appreciate a little civilization and give up their barbarous ways.

It did not, however, work out quite that way.

The opportunity to apply the solution came when a great rebellion broke out in the closing years of Elizabeth's reign. It was suppressed only with difficulty. Following it, large sections of the country lay devastated and depopulated. New farmers for the vacant areas of excellent agricultural land were an obvious need.

The seat of the rebellion lay in the northern province of Ulster. Here was the last stronghold of the Celtic race, the heart of Gaelic culture. Here the great earls of Tyrone and Tyrconnell held sway over the fierce clans of O'Neill and O'Donnell, the proudest and most warlike of Ireland's people. When the land lay prostrate nothing, it seemed, could better insure future peace than for this particular province to be given to loyal Protestants from across the Irish sea.

This was the origin of the plantation of Ulster.

A large-scale transplantation of people from the north of Britain resulted. Some English, but mostly Scots from Ayrshire and other Lowland shires, took advantage of the opportunity to exchange their rocky acres for the fertile soil of Ulster.

The Scots who settled Ulster never, despite the close proximity, married with the native Irish. Religion and national pride kept them apart. This is why the name Scotch-Irish, so commonly applied to their descendants when they came to America, is a misnomer; it suggests a mixed ancestry, and these people were as pure Scots as those that stayed at home. Ulstermen would be a better name for them. They, too, were Calvinists; this is what put the stamp of uniqueness upon the colony and its history. But we must not make the mistake of thinking of them at this point as pious, religiously motivated folk, or even as "good" Presbyterians. Their Presbyterianism was as yet most rudimentary, and little godliness can be discerned in their behavior, nor can anything idealistic be found in their motivation.

Their story was soon to be a dark one of almost continuous persecution, but a bright interlude occurred when they encountered, for once, a Primate of the Anglican Church who was also a great Christian statesman. This was Archbishop James Ussher, head of the Church of Ireland. If he had been at all typical of his day,

the whole course of Anglican-Presbyterian relations, so unnecessarily tragic and unhappy, would have been different.

Ussher was a learned man; he understood the meaning of the Reformation because he had absorbed it from his teachers. He knew what Calvin and the other Reformers had taught. Above all, he knew that there was only one, and could only be one, church of the Lord Jesus Christ.

While there might be differing ideas about how this one church should be constituted, how it should be governed, what forms of worship and ritual it should observe, these should not be cause of division and strife among Christians, and the good Archbishop tried to be a healer, not a maker, of division. Specifically, he worked out a plan by which the two churches of Protestant Britain could have been reconciled without sacrifice of anything essential by either. His scheme provided for elected presbyters to work with the bishop in the oversight of a diocese, and it recognized the validity of Presbyterian ordination, which is the snag on which most such proposals even today come to grief.

The arrival in Dublin of the great Earl of Strafford, Charles I's lord deputy of Ireland, abruptly put an end to all such reconciling foolishness. He came to impose the royal policy of uniformity, adding to it his own special ingredient of "thoroughness." His idea of the way to rule Ireland was to make all the king's subjects take an oath of allegiance which included renunciation of anything contrary to the royal will, such as Scottish Covenants.

For the Ulstermen, sharing their countrymen's sentiments across the narrow sea, this was truly a Black Oath—and they would not take it. So the long, bitter sequence of refusal, resistance, and repression began.

Strafford had a genius for so uniting enemies that every element in Ireland became opposed to the king's government. Terrible consequences now flowed from this. During the years, the dispossessed Irish had been quietly nursing their grievances, waiting for the day when they could wreak vengeance on the intruders. The plantation of Ulster had meant for them only the bitter choice of becoming the new occupants' tenants at will, or taking to the mountains.

This day of vengeance had now come. With the suddenness of an eruption, the Irish fell upon the colonists with fire and sword and carried all before them; farms, barns, and stacks went up in flames; men, women, and children were slaughtered. Only walled towns resisted the onslaught of the maddened people. Terrified settlers fled the country. The English ports of Chester and Bristol became choked with refugees.

Nobody knows the death toll; calculations have run up to 100,000.

Yet this ordeal proved one thing: it tested the colonists' fiber. Similar experience was to be theirs again and again in their historic role of frontiersmen, first on one side of the Atlantic, and later the other.

#### A PRESBYTERIAN PROVINCE

The outlines of a strong Presbyterian province began to take shape immediately after the uprising was put down by Oliver Cromwell and the land resettled by survivors of its former colonists, reinforced by more people of a like mind and race. Cromwell had not finished his ruthless job before they were busy rebuilding.

Cromwell's army contained a number of zealous Presbyterians, who organized sessions of elders even in their regiments. Many joined the settlers when they were discharged. Soon their fervor spread, and a Presbyterian Church made its appearance.

The first presbytery was formed in Carrickfergus, just north of Belfast. It held its first meeting on June 10, 1642, which was only a year after the uprising. One of its first actions was to send for help to Scotland. Six of the Scottish Church's best men responded.

By the time the next challenge came, from Charles II's re-established Anglicanism, the Ulster Presbyterians were ready for it. We can count as many as 80 congregations, with 70 ministers, 5 presbyteries, and with some 100,000 communicants. Surely, a remarkable recovery for a land that had so recently been ravaged and torn apart.

They needed every bit of this strength, both of spirit and of numbers, to survive the time when Covenanters in Ulster were hunted down and slaughtered in their hills and glens as in Scotland.

The revolution that was "glorious" put Calvinist William of Orange on England's throne in place of the Roman Catholic James II. When James sought with French aid to regain his crown, he landed in Ireland and marched on Ulster. Facing a papist army led by a papist king, the Scots rose as one man, and though unarmed and untrained, they held their little seaport stronghold of Londonderry until William came to their rescue. The defense of Derry, from April to July, 1689, ranks as an epic in military annals. And the Ulstermen still celebrate as a national holiday the final great victory of that campaign, won by William and his Protestant army on the banks of the Boyne. For this once, the forces of Calvinism triumphed decisively over their foes, and great was the exultation over the victory.

Renewed persecution came with the accession to power of the Anglican High Church party in Queen Anne's reign. Presbyterians in Ireland were subjected to the same disabilities as their Dissenting brothers in England; their schools and colleges closed, their marriages invalidated, the doors to public service slammed shut in their faces. But the now strongly rooted Presbyterianism could not be extirpated by such methods.

#### THE EXODUS

If the English had wanted to drive the dissidents out of the country, there were other and more effective ways in which it could be done. The age of tolerance and reason might be dawning, but it did not, as yet, include equal rights and opportunities for all. Colonial peoples, in particular, did not enjoy the privileges of Englishmen—and the Ulstermen were colonials.

In one way after another, the enterprising Ulstermen came up against the prevailing economic theory which allowed the mother country to do any kind of injury to her colonies to protect the home market, even to banning importation and cutting off trade.

First it happened to their cattle, then to their cloth. They could not export their livestock, or their fine woolens, either to England or to America, because of what their competition began to do to the English producer. That the laws passed by a subservient Parliament at the behest of the landed interest meant ruin for Ulster was quite beside the point.



The Ulstermen were a stubborn breed, however; it took more than that to drive them from the acres which they had cultivated and developed with so much industry. Only actual starvation, it seems, could do that.

Another injustice speeded the process of despair. About the time that these economic blows were descending, their leases began to fall in. These were the leases that their grandfathers had made with James' "undertakers." The lands, of course, had greatly increased in value since then. So now the landlords, exercising the rights of landlords, proceeded to increase the rents accordingly. Sometimes the increased rent was as much as triple what it had been before.

These increased rents came on top of what the tenants were already paying in the way of tithes for the maintenance of an ecclesiastical establishment which, for reasons stated, they not only did not attend but violently hated.

The burdens were too many, their impoverishment too great, the oppression of their rulers too unendurable—especially when there was now a land of promise to the west beckoning a welcome.

The last straw was a succession of bad harvests—three in a row—bringing famine and destitution to the land.

The Ulstermen's exodus, which began as a trickle and became a great flood lasting for half a century, commenced in 1717, making that a year of great consequence both for America and, ultimately, for England.

## *Chapter IX*

# THE SCOTS ATTAIN A GOAL

Before taking ship ourselves and following the Ulstermen across the Atlantic, let us have one final look at Presbyterianism in its Scottish homeland. The close ties that bind our churches make this the more necessary.

It was now an age of transition. When we reach the 1688 revolution, it is like crossing a watershed where the springs that produce the rivers of history begin flowing in opposite directions. With the Age of Reason the circumstances that produced such a document as the Westminster Confession of Faith vanished. The fires of enthusiasm that signed the National Covenant were doused, never to return. And just as dead was the persecuting spirit which caused Covenanters to be killed like vermin. No longer did governments feel compelled to insist on uniformity in the religious life of their people. At least, this was true in Britain. And the change of mood was formally recognized when the English Parliament passed the Toleration Act, limited though its application still was.

In Scotland, the change of climate became visible as soon as the Calvinist William of Orange succeeded the intolerable Stuarts on the throne. There had been a growing colony of Presbyterian exiles in Holland during the Covenanters' "killing time." Among them was the Reverend William Carstares of Edinburgh, who became the minister of the Scottish church in Leyden. He gained the prince's friendship, accompanying him to England when he made his bid for the throne. After its success he remained on for a while in London, acting as the king's adviser on Scottish affairs. Like his royal master, he represented the new age. He was a sound man, balanced in his views, broad in his sympathies; there was nothing

of the zealot or fanatic in his makeup. Four times his fellow churchmen were to show their approval by electing him their moderator.

The kind of thing Carstares would have none of was that relic of an evil past, loyalty oaths. When King William in ignorance of Scottish sentiment was on the point of taking a blundering step in that direction, it was Carstares who saved him from it. For Carstares knew that with the exercise of just a little tact—like not disputing the Scots' formal assertion of the kingship of Jesus Christ—William would have no trouble with the Church of Scotland. Nor did he.

And so, at last, the Scots were rewarded for their loyalty by having their Presbyterianism established as the national church. The Covenants, having played their part in history, were quietly laid to rest, with only a handful of people to mourn their passing.

The keynote for the new age was set when the king advised the church: "Moderation is what religion enjoins, neighbouring churches expect from you, and we recommend to you." The advice was so much taken to heart that the dominant party in the church during the whole of the eighteenth century was known as the Moderates. "Do nothing to rock the boat of harmony with the state" would well describe this party's general outlook and policy on church matters.

#### THE PATRONAGE ISSUE

The harmony might well have continued unbroken but for a foolish act of Queen Anne's Parliament, now by the Act of Union of England and Scotland the law-making body for both countries.

By passing the Patronage Act (1717), Parliament reimposed upon the Church of Scotland an old law giving lay patrons, heirs of the original donors of church property, the right to present ministers to parishes. This struck very close to the heart of Presbyterianism itself, for there is no more cherished right among us than that of congregations to choose and call their own pastors. Opposition there was bound to be, else Presbyterians would have ceased being Presbyterians. And, in point of fact, this remained a principal bone of contention in Scotland right up to the day the odious act was repealed, which did not come until 1874.

Presbyterians are noted for being somewhat contentious folk; at times our history almost makes people suspect that if we did not have something to fight about we would have to create that something, or feel hopelessly lost in the swampland of inertia and apathy! Be this as it may, we shall have to note, as our story proceeds, a tendency to split apart and form schisms, not always over matters of first importance. This tendency, most marked in Scotland, naturally became more acute as the fervor that originally united the nation behind its religion waned. At one time, a century later, when the spirit of contention and division reached its height, it was even possible to count thirteen separate Presbyterian bodies! Wits then said that the Scots, so noted for their theological concern, displayed their national genius most convincingly by demonstrating just how many different ways they could split their Calvinism! But splitting Calvinism is not the same as splitting the atom, and there is no doubt that Presbyterianism suffered severely from its own divisions.

Lay patronage, however, was undoubtedly an issue that demanded the utmost respect. The Scots who fought it were being neither stubborn nor fanatical; they were entirely right in their belief that the church's very life and vitality was at stake. The evil they were opposing is one of the oldest in the history of the Christian church—Erastianism, state control of the church. Any Presbyterian who remembered his history should have been aroused by it.

It meant not only that undesired men could be appointed to parishes, but undesirable, and sometimes completely unfit, men as well. Equally as bad, it opened the door to hypocrites. Candidates for the ministry needed only to pay lip service to the confession of faith to become eligible for appointment. The earnest probing to discover their true beliefs and real convictions was no longer the only way into the ministry.

It is not surprising then that when Ebenezer Erskine, a mighty preacher, arose to denounce the evil he should have found a large following. A walkout from the Assembly followed, and a rival church was set up.

This is as far as we can carry the Scottish story. But before we leave it, we must note the presence among Erskine's followers of

one who was to play a very big part in our American story. John Witherspoon made his first dent on history by championing the rights of free conscience and a free church against the Moderates. He first brought himself to public attention with a devastating satire upon the whole Moderate position. Shortly after this, the call came to him to become President of the College of New Jersey. He embarked on the brig *Peggy* at Glasgow on May 18, 1768, and arrived at Philadelphia on August 7.



PART THREE

**AMERICA**



## Chapter X

# BIRTH OF AN AMERICAN CHURCH

One thing that history has not given Presbyterians in America is a simple memorable beginning. They should have founded a colony like other groups.

The Congregationalists can boast of Massachusetts and Connecticut. The Baptists need never tire of relating the epic of Providence and Rhode Island. The Episcopalians can lay proud claim to the royal colony of Virginia. The Quakers will always be identified with Pennsylvania. Even our Dutch Reformed cousins have their New Amsterdam—New York—and the Catholics their Maryland. Great names in American history add further luster to each of these stories: William Bradford, John Winthrop, Roger Williams, William Penn, George Calvert, Peter Stuyvesant. But when we come to the page where Presbyterian should be writ equally large, either as a group or as individuals, what we find is a blank, with not even a record of anyone's landing! The Pilgrims came on the *Mayflower*; William Penn arrived on the good ship *Welcome*; but who knows what ships carried the humble impoverished folk to whom we so largely owe the beginnings of Presbyterianism on these shores?

Even these beginnings after they landed are veiled in obscurity. Historians have to be cautious when they try to identify congregations as the first to be formed in this colony or that.

In all this, there is an important lesson to be learned. The significant events of history are not necessarily those that capture the headlines. It is good, and certainly much easier, to remember the splendidly solid facts, like Columbus discovered America in 1492; William Penn founded Philadelphia in 1682; the Declaration of Independence was signed in 1776. But these are not the only events that determined our future.



Perhaps, of all the events that determined America's future in the 150 years of its colonial existence the most significant is the one for which there is no single date, no headline, no marker; in fact, scarcely any record at all: the influx, year after year, for fifty years or so, of boatload after boatload of those Presbyterian Scots from Ulster, creating in the total result the first really big migration of people to come to America.

The coming of these people reminds us forcefully of those lines of Arthur Hugh Clough: ". . . through creeks and inlets making,/ Comes silent, flooding in, the main."

For seen in retrospect, this *was* the American mainstream in a very real sense. The coming of the Ulster Scots did more than anything else to transform timid, dependent colonials, sheltering under the lea of the mother country, looking to her when they needed help, counsel, protection, into strong, self-reliant, independent nationhood, able to stand on their own American feet.

#### THE HUGUENOT EXODUS FROM FRANCE

There is no question about what brought the first Presbyterians to these shores; it was persecution. From the German Palatinate, from Huguenot France, from the Netherlands, from England, Wales, and Scotland, and above all, from northern Ireland, harassed refugees came to the American wilderness seeking a land where they could work out a new destiny for themselves, where they might reap the harvest of their own labors, where they might be free to worship God in their own Reformed way, where the hand of the oppressor could no longer reach them.

If you had been a French Protestant when Louis XIV revoked the Edict of Nantes in 1685 and so put an end to the protection and liberties that Huguenots had enjoyed in France for nearly a century, this is what you would have experienced. You would have seen the order given for the demolition of every house of Protestant worship. With all services banned, all ministers expelled, sent to the galleys, or effectively silenced, and all your seminaries and private schools closed, you would know that you could no longer practice your faith, publicly at least, in your own country. Furthermore, you would have the knowledge that your children

would be taken away from you, to be baptized and brought up as Catholics. And if you fled the country you would have to go penniless as all your property would be confiscated.

Getting rid of Protestants by driving them out was not what Louis XIV had in mind, however—he hoped to convert them and so restore the unity of the nation. Severest measures were indeed taken to prevent the Huguenots from escaping. But the iron curtain that was dropped around France was not as close-meshed as similar curtains in these days. The exodus was large; nobody knows exactly how large. The truest estimate is probably that a quarter of a million people got out.

They went in all directions. Some were smuggled out by boat to England, Ireland, Wales, the Scandinavian countries. More made their way over the closed frontiers to Switzerland, Germany, the Netherlands. Everywhere they were very welcome people because, penniless though they were, they had in their clever hands and intelligent heads the essential skills and industrial secrets that had spelled France's economic supremacy for years. Germany was particularly glad to receive them to repair the fearful ravages of the Thirty Years' War which had left the land depopulated. Berlin's greatness as a city dates from the arrival of these industrious and resourceful Presbyterians from France.

Many came to America.

The Huguenots have left many traces of their contribution to America. In New York they settled on Staten Island, and New Rochelle was named by them after the famous fortress in the south of France which they had defended so long and valiantly in the days of Cardinal Richelieu. A city park in New Rochelle is called Huguenot Park.

Paul Revere, the noted silversmith, came of Huguenot stock; and so have many other illustrious Americans.

We need to go back even before the persecutions of Louis to find the actual beginning of Huguenot settlement in America. Admiral de Coligny was a great colonizer. He sent a party of Huguenots to Florida as early as 1562. Recently, the 400th anniversary of the landing of Jean Ribaut and his party on what is now Parris Island, the Marine Corps' recruit training base, was commemo-

rated in South Carolina. The commemorative half-dollar which the state issued bore these words: "Commemorating the first attempt to plant a colony of free men in North America."

Truly, the attempted Huguenot settlement in the New World was a prologue to freedom.

#### PRESBYTERIAN BEGINNINGS

Presbyterian beginnings in America can be traced to the earliest days of English settlement. The point to bear in mind is that there was no organization, and Presbyterians did not usually recognize their own identity as such.

In New England and New York the beginnings are bound up with Puritan Congregationalism. In 1640 the people of Lynn, Massachusetts, found themselves straitened, as John Winthrop, their governor, put it, and looked out for a new plantation. About forty families led by their minister Abraham Pierson settled on the southern shore of Long Island at Southampton. Others from New-haven followed, settling at Southwold, and soon still more came, so that in a few years seven churches had been formed in what we know as Suffolk County.

These all regarded themselves at first as Congregationalists, and it was only later that they affiliated with the Presbyterian Church.

The first permanent Presbyterian church in America, founded as such, was probably—note the "probably"—the one formed in the western end of Long Island, at Jamaica, in 1672.

Westchester County in New York came next. Five congregations there, from 1683 onward, had a character that was more or less Presbyterian, though, again, the people did not bother much about labels, and in the eyes of the Anglicans who then ruled New York, they were all, Congregationalists, Independents, and Presbyterians alike, lumped together as "dissenters."

Perhaps Connecticut, since so many of the first members came from there, has the best claim to be considered the actual cradle of American Presbyterianism, although this statement may be disputed in the South where Presbyterian influence is discernible from the settlement of Virginia onward, and notably in Maryland.

Maryland has, in fact, the honor of being the second cradle. In

the year 1683 a young man landed on its shores and by his deeds earned the enviable title which he has ever since borne of Father of American Presbyterianism.

#### FRANCIS MAKEMIE

Francis Makemie had the qualities of a founding father; the stuff of a pioneer marked all that he did. His very coming to America proved that. It followed hard upon his ordination into the ministry by his presbytery of Laggan in the north of Ireland. He heard and answered the call for help that came from some of his countrymen who had settled in Maryland a few years before and felt the need of a minister of their faith.

The very first thing we learn about Makemie reveals the quality of the man: he established five new churches, all of which are still in existence.

Like Paul and so many missionaries, Makemie had to earn his living with a trade. He became a merchant, traveling up and down the coast from New York to the Barbadoes, combining business with his real vocation in a remarkably effective way. But when he sought out Presbyterians, he found them unkindly scattered. With wry humor he attributed their seeming inability to collect themselves into towns to "some strange unaccountable humor." Organizing them into congregations under these circumstances was obviously a difficult job. But his work went on and the day came when he decided he must have help. The summer of 1704 found him in London, appealing for men and funds. His appeal was successful. He returned to America accompanied by two graduates of the University of Glasgow, John Hampton and George McNish.

Makemie was now ready to proceed with the great work he had in mind, the organization of a Presbyterian Church on American soil. Immediately after his return he sent out invitations to his brother ministers to meet with him in Philadelphia the following spring, that is to say, in 1706.

This meeting of seven ministers, with the election of Makemie as moderator, was in every way a historic one not only for our church but for America. It made us the first denomination to create

an independent American church, owing no allegiance to outside authority, able to license and ordain its own ministry.

This was a providential piece of timing because it came on the eve of the great influx. When the people of the Reformed faith began to arrive in numbers from their several parts of Europe, they found waiting to receive them an organized church of like belief whose bounds were soon to be coterminous with the thirteen colonies. Thus America's famous melting pot began its functioning right in our own church.

We see this plainly when we look at the national origins of the first twenty-five Presbyterian ministers in America. Eight were natives of Scotland; seven were from Ulster; another seven were native New Englanders; the remaining three were Welsh. Almost at once, Dutch, German, and French (Huguenot) elements were added.

No less significantly, American Presbyterianism proved itself evangelistic from the start. An overture was adopted at that first meeting of presbytery which read: "That every minister of the presbytery supply neighboring desolate places where a minister is wanting and opportunity of doing good offers."

A dynamic force was preparing itself to undertake the conversion of a continent.

#### "DISTURBER OF GOVERNMENTS"

Today every moderator of the church makes a tour of the area covered by his denomination. Francis Makemie can be said to have established the practice. When the meeting of presbytery was over, he and John Hampton set out. Their specific aims were to form new congregations and find recruits for the ministry.

Their itinerary brought them to New York City, and here they ran into trouble—trouble that put Presbyterianism on America's map of history. The general public for the first time were provided with news headlines that featured our church.

New York's governor at this time was a petty tyrant named Lord Cornbury. He either had not heard of the Toleration Act which the English Parliament had recently passed, or was too stupid, arrogant, and bigoted to pay heed to it. He preferred to en-

force a local colonial law that a dissenting minister could not preach without a license.

Makemie and Hampton applied for such a license to preach in the Dutch church of Manhattan, and when it was refused they proceeded to speak in private homes. This open defiance of his will infuriated the governor. He had them immediately arrested on the charge of being "strolling preachers" who had preached without his permission.

The Presbyterian ministers' reply is comparable to Paul's and Barnabas's when confronted with a similar situation. "Yet if his Lordship required it, we would give Security for our Behaviour; but to give Bond and Security to Preach no more in your Excellency's Government, if invited and desired by any people, we neither can, nor dare do."

Makemie and Hampton were sent to prison. At last, released on bail, they had a chance to prepare their defense. The news of their arrest and imprisonment had spread and aroused popular feeling. The people of New England were especially aroused; they at once sent off a strong protest to London. Three of New York's ablest lawyers sprang to the accused men's help, offering to defend them in court.

Makemie handled his own defense—the charge against Hampton was dropped—and no one was better able to do it, for his equipment as a minister of the gospel was remarkable. Lord Cornbury unwittingly did posterity a favor by increasing our very scanty knowledge of this father of our American church. He left a description of him as a jack-of-all-trades: "he is a Preacher, a Doctor of Physick, a Merchant, and Attorney, or Counsellor at law, and which is worst of all, a Disturber of Governments."

A disturber of governments like Lord Cornbury's, Francis Makemie certainly was. When the governor tried to browbeat him—"How dare you take upon yourself to preach in my government without my license? None shall preach in my government without my license"—Makemie was ready for him. He pointed out to his lordship that he had a license to preach, which had been issued to him in Barbadoes, that under English law and by the Act of Toleration it was good throughout Queen Anne's dominions, and he

produced the license. Then, point by point, he refuted the whole of the charge, exposing as he did so its utter flimsiness and injustice. When the case went to the jury there could be only one just verdict, and "Not Guilty" it was.

The governor revealed his spiteful character when, despite the acquittal, he made Makemie and Hampton pay the entire cost of the trial, a sum that amounted to more than a minister's entire salary.

The unpopular governor met with his just deserts. The New York legislature levied formal charges of misconduct against him and he was recalled in disgrace.

The victory was a notable one for free speech, religious liberty, and justice. The reputation the Presbyterians gained of being champions of these rights was one they never lost.

Makemie did not live long to enjoy his popularity, dying the following year, at the age of 50. He was buried on his farm in Virginia.

In 1906, when the 200th anniversary of our first American Presbytery was being celebrated in Philadelphia, Henry van Dyke, a noted Presbyterian divine and hymn-writer, wrote this tribute to its organizer:

To thee, plain hero of a rugged race,  
We bring a mead of praise too long delayed.  
Oh, who can tell how much we owe to thee,  
Makemie, and to labors such as thine  
For all that makes America the shrine  
Of faith untrammelled and of conscience free?  
Stand here, gray stone, and consecrate the sod  
Where sleeps this brave Scotch-Irish man of God.

## *Chapter XI*

# THE CHURCH RENEWED

Presbyterianism had reached the decisive crossroad in its history. Which way it now went would determine its future character as an American church. If one way, it might have become just another sect, like the multitude that have grown up on American soil. For it had within itself the seeds of exclusiveness. Many Presbyterians, in every generation, have been too smugly convinced of their own righteousness, of their own monopoly as Calvinists of the truth, their own possession of a scripturally sound polity. It would not have taken much to give this kind of Presbyterian, with his strong convictions about what was "orthodox" and what was not, control of the church. It almost happened. If it had, Presbyterianism would have been far less interested in advancing the Kingdom of God than in serving itself. In America's pluralism of religions it became, of necessity, a denomination; it did not have to become a sect.

The other way may be called the ecumenical way; it meant retaining a firm grasp, as Calvin had done, on the whole concept of the universal church, determining to avoid the many pitfalls of sectarianism and to be a church that could embrace within its fold all who could make the simple affirmation, "I believe in Jesus Christ as Lord," without regard to minor creedal difference.

The choice often hung in the balance, but the second was the way American Presbyterianism actually went.

Our story does, in fact, fall into two parts, an Old Testament and a New, with the New Testament part commencing at this point. The analogy has relevance because, just as the biblical Old Testament deals with the Hebrew people's struggle to preserve their worship and independence, so our story has hitherto dealt principally with the similar struggle of the Scots.



The analogy can be carried further. As the Law of Moses was the dominant religious concern of the Hebrews, so did concern with the same law dominate the religious life of our Scottish forebears. In both peoples legalism and coercion had to be discarded that a faith based on love and conviction of the faith might triumph. But now, Presbyterianism's heroic age, when resistance to tyranny was almost the be-all and end-all of its existence, yielded to a new age—its New Testament age—in which the chief concern of Christians could be boiled down to: Evangelism—Mission.

#### WILLIAM TENNENT AND LOG COLLEGE

Like most such new ages, this one had a dark beginning. Vital religion could scarcely have been deader than at the turn of that century. Of lip service to Christianity there was no lack; and agnostics, atheists, deists, Unitarians, and rationalists were frowned upon in church circles as usual. But where were the men who knew that Christianity was more than formal assent to a creed?

It was high time that men began asking themselves again, What is Christianity? And began wondering whether it was enough to prove one's faith simply by assenting to some fixed immutable body of doctrine which had the seal of orthodoxy stamped upon it, or putting one's name, or mark, to a Covenant, as though it were a legal document, a petition, or a loyalty oath.

Happily, there were still those in the church who had not forgotten a slogan of the Reformers in the early days of the Reformation: "*Ecclesia reformata semper est reformanda*" "The Church reformed must ever be reforming."

The time had come to put this slogan back to work. Presbyterianism had used up its original supply of energy and was badly in need of a new dynamic.

As the eighteenth century progressed through its second decade, the influx of Ulster Scots grew from a trickle to a torrent. Not always, or everywhere, did they find a welcome. Five shiploads arrived at the port of Boston only to find a "Not Wanted" sign posted. Most of the immigrants went to the middle colonies. New York and Pennsylvania, already having serious border problems, needed

frontiersmen and recognized the Ulstermen's unique worth as such. They dispatched the new arrivals with all haste to the backwoods to serve as buffers against the Indians.

In New York the first Scotch-Irish settlements were on the west bank of the Hudson, in counties that they immediately named Ulster and Orange. Presbyterian churches soon sprang up there as a result.

Meanwhile, Presbyterianism had made its start in William Penn's hospitable colony. Makemie had journeyed there in August 1692 and gathered the scattered faithful together for worship in a storehouse of the Barbadoes Company in Philadelphia. Five years later a young man of 25, Jedediah Andrews, arrived from Harvard, organized the First Presbyterian Church of Philadelphia, and remained its minister for almost 50 years.

Before 1710 there were, in addition, a Dutch congregation in Bucks County and a Welsh congregation in the Great Valley in Chester County. Both joined the presbytery. Thus by 1717 our church had grown from one presbytery to three served by 25 ministers in all, and a synod had to be formed to give overall government. The Synod of Philadelphia came into existence that year.

A few years later there settled on the banks of the Neshaminy Creek, just outside Philadelphia, a man who was asking the necessary basic questions about the nature of Christianity and the Reformed faith. As he did so he came face to face with the greatest single problem that confronted the infant Presbyterian Church of America—its lack of any place on its own soil in which to train its sons for the ministry. Being the kind of man he was, he decided to supply the lack himself.

Utilizing first his manse, then building a rustic schoolhouse measuring 20 feet by 20, William Tennent, a former Irish Anglican, started our first theological seminary. Here young men received a combined biblical and humanistic course of studies, in the best approved tradition of the Reformed church. No longer did they have to go, at great expense, to Scotland, or to Harvard or Yale, where the course of instruction was not all that Presbyterians were coming to want.

Its founder said of Harvard College, "From little acorns do great

oaks grow." The same prophecy could have been made of this Log College, which not only graduated some 18 men in the few years of its existence, from whom stemmed most of the events now to be related, but was the ancestor of many similar institutions.

#### THE SUBSCRIPTION ISSUE

The Scots from Ulster were bringing with them a religion somewhat different from that taking shape in Puritan America. Religion in the old country was more conservative in its theology, more rigid in adherence to strict Calvinism, more static and formal in expression, more clerically dominated. When it came to ordination of their ministers, the Ulstermen's ideas went little further than to recognize that ministers should be educated, orthodox in belief, and regularly ordained. The foremost requirement for ordination was acceptance of the Westminster standards in their entirety.

The men from Harvard and Yale, and later the graduates of Log College, had other ideas; they had received a more liberal education and had come to see that even such a matchless statement of the Reformed faith as the Westminster Confession contained statements that did not jibe with their beliefs, or with the Reformed faith itself. More and more they were seeing dogma as fetters upon their minds and chafing under them.

To give one instance, how could the words "God alone is Lord of the conscience," which are implanted in the very heart of the Confession, and which imply the whole principle of evangelical liberty, be consistent with the practice of compelling men to subscribe to the entire Confession, regardless of the objections of individual consciences?

Here was a contradiction in the very center of our Presbyterian faith that had to be removed, and removed it was. The most eminent man in the church, Jonathan Dickinson, Yale graduate and minister at Elizabeth, New Jersey, led the opposition to the Scotch-Irish subscriptionists, the name by which they became known. What more powerful argument could he have employed than that his opponents were claiming for the church a power to determine what Christians must believe which Christ himself never gave it?

As Dickinson insisted, the Word of God in these matters is all-sufficient.

A reasonable compromise was arrived at. It was agreed that a standard of doctrine was an essential, but that not all the articles in the Confession were equally essential and that, therefore, unqualified subscription to every jot and tittle in it was not to be required of candidates for the ministry. So long as a man could subscribe to the system of belief in general and to its most important parts, he was to be permitted to have scruples against certain less essential parts.

This compromise, known as the Adopting Act of 1729, still governs our church.

#### THE GREAT AWAKENING

The fight over subscription was a mere preliminary skirmish for what immediately followed. In that same year one of the most significant and explosive preaching ministries in our church history began. Gilbert Tennent, eldest son of the Log College teacher, accepted the pastorate of the church at New Brunswick, New Jersey. He keyed all his preaching to the words of Jesus spoken to Nicodemus, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

A revolution started right there. For no longer were a mere verbal profession of faith, baptism in the required manner, and some proven acquaintance with the catechism deemed sufficient evidences that a person was really a Christian and one ready to assume the responsibilities of membership in the Presbyterian church. Jesus Christ himself had to figure vitally in the whole undertaking from this point on.

Revivals don't always start in one place, with one man. Some small Dutch Reformed congregations in New Jersey were also at that moment being awakened by their pastor, Theodore J. Frelinghuysen, who had come over from Holland to take charge of them. He happened to be a Calvinist of the earlier Calvinist stamp and was therefore dissatisfied with the prevailing lifeless religion of the day. Simultaneously, up in New England, the minister of Northampton, Massachusetts, the eminent Jonathan Edwards, had

also become profoundly dissatisfied with his own failure to arouse zeal and dedication in his flock. All three men, having experienced genuine renewal in their own lives, set to work to convey it to their flocks.

And then it happened! A spark so electric that it set fire first to these congregations and others in the immediate areas, then it spread everywhere, so that the fires became a conflagration and by the year 1740 the Great Awakening was in full force through the length and breadth of the thirteen colonies.

The men who led the revival in our church were graduates of the Log College, rallying behind the leadership of Jonathan Dickinson. Inevitably, they encountered opposition from the same group of traditionalists that had pressed the matter of subscription. But this time the opposition went deeper and further.

In the first place, the opponents of the revival did not consider the Log College men properly educated. The name "Log College" had actually been their term of derision for William Tennent's primitive effort, and their contempt was natural. After all, were they not themselves all graduates of world famous universities?

Next they noted that the Log College men were in turn accepting for ordination men who had not been properly "called": men were being allowed to preach whose only qualification was an inner call from God.

Here was an issue of real importance. The Log College men maintained that a valid distinction can be made between God's call of a man into his ministry and a presbytery's ordination of him. The denial of this by the anti-revivalists was the crux of the question. Could the anti-revivalists' contention that God only acts through the duly constituted officers of the church be accepted? Or its corollary, that every man duly set apart by the church is truly called of God?

It did not seem so to Jonathan Dickinson and his friends. To them it seemed that a claim was being put forward here that presbyteries have divine right, so that God cannot act through any other but official channels! And this, of course, was an impossible claim to anyone who remembered what the Protestant Reformation had been all about. It was precisely this sort of claim for the

ecclesiastical organization of their day that Luther, Calvin, and the other Reformers had all repudiated.

Finally, there was so much in the revivals themselves that the conservative Scots disapproved of. Revivals produced excitement, undignified, even on occasions, outrageous behavior, and the Scots liked worship with due form and proper reverence. Revivals led to excesses of speech and conduct. Obviously, the revivals were full of danger, and the church must oppose them.

For a time it was touch and go whether the opposition to revivals would have its way. When the matter came up for debate in synod, those who upheld the revivals as the work of the Holy Spirit were outnumbered by their opponents twenty to five. The names of the stalwart five—all Log College men—are worth remembering: Jonathan Dickinson, Gilbert Tennent, his two brothers William and Charles, and Samuel Blair. Then they received a dynamic reinforcement which more than balanced the disparity in numbers.

George Whitefield, the greatest preacher of that day, and perhaps of any day, arrived from England. Landing at Philadelphia in November 1739, he preached there for nine consecutive days. As he came with a great reputation, with thousands waiting to hear him, a special "tabernacle" had to be built to contain the multitudes that flocked to hear him. From Philadelphia he linked forces with Gilbert Tennent, and together they made preaching tours up and down the seaboard demonstrating the power of God.

The revival was saved in our church. But its saving was bought at a price, the price of a schism.

By now the anti-revivalists had more grievances to support their strong stand in opposition. The excitement and excessive emotion was one thing; but what really riled them was the way—or at least so they charged—revivalist preachers were thrusting themselves—intruding was the word—into other men's parishes and becoming divisive forces. Most of all, they resented what they called the revivalists' censoriousness.

It would be hard to believe that there was not a great deal of truth in this last charge. A person who has experienced the "second birth" of becoming a Christian, knowing the anguish of conviction of sin and the ecstasy that comes with repentance and forgive-

ness, is not likely to be charitable in his judgment of those who claim to be Christians without such experience, and especially if they happen to be ministers. He is apt to speak quite bluntly of the blind leading the blind, as Gilbert Tennent did when he preached on "The Danger of an Unconverted Ministry." Tennent minced no words, and it was a highly obnoxious performance from the point of view of the anti-revivalists. He had his sermon printed and distributed, which compounded his offense.

Schism followed. The revivalists found themselves cast out of the synod. But being by now strong in the other two presbyteries, the revivalists were able to secede and organize their own synod, which they called the Synod of New York.

#### THE FOUNDING OF PRINCETON

The Synod of New York, the center of ecumenical Presbyterianism for several generations, was specifically dedicated to upholding the evangelizing work of the revival, preserving the liberty of the gospel, maintaining reasonable authority in the Presbyterian Church, holding open the door to all Christians, and keeping peace and unity in the church of Jesus Christ. Nothing had so distressed the Log College men as the sectarian spirit, which they denounced as an evil thing, a most clear and reprehensible failure in Christian love. Consequently, they had been able to welcome Whitefield, an Anglican, and to seek friendly relations with their Anglican brethren. In the best sense, they were secular rather than ecclesiastically minded, concerned with the public welfare and not only the church's.

The most concrete and characteristic expression of this wide outlook was the founding of the College of New Jersey, which later became Princeton University.

The need of an institution to prepare men for an evangelistic ministry had been clearly demonstrated, and this was the original purpose of the college. But if it was a sectarian school, it was one with a difference—and this difference made it a landmark in American history. For, while it was closely related to the Presbyterian Church, it was never an official Presbyterian college. It gave a broad liberal arts education, and it was open to all students, re-

gardless of denomination. From the first it was serving, as intended by its founders, other, bigger ends than the sectarian.

The college's board of trustees reflected its true character. Many of its trustees were from Yale, a few from Harvard. Quakers, Episcopalians, and other laymen were represented on it. The ex-officio chairman was the governor of New Jersey, Jonathan Belcher. From the first, it was inter-colonial and inter-denominational. The College of New Jersey became, in fact, America's first secular, liberal, and national institution of higher learning, dedicated to serving those higher ends of truth, justice, and freedom which have ever formed the American idea of the meaning of the Kingdom of God.

The college opened its doors in October 1746. Its first home was the manse of its president, Jonathan Dickinson, at Newark, New Jersey. It found its permanent home when it moved shortly to Princeton.

The division between "Old Side" and "New Side" Presbyterians lasted for thirteen years. By 1758, when the schism was closed by a reconciliation, "New Side" ministers of the New York Synod had increased from 22 to 72; "Old Side" ministers of the Philadelphia Synod on the other hand had decreased from 24 to 23. The figures were significant in showing what happened to Presbyterianism during this crucial phase of its existence.



## *Chapter XII*

# THE CAUSE OF LIBERTY

It has been stated often that the Presbyterians did not begin to value liberty until they reached American soil, that until then their minds had been set upon becoming an established church so that they could impose their religion upon their neighbors. While our story has shown that this was their objective earlier in their history, the facts indicate that it had ceased to be when they organized themselves into a church in America. By then, perhaps because of all their grim experiences at the hands of intolerant establishments in the countries from which they came, they had set their face strongly toward freedom, both for themselves and for everybody else, including non-believers.

This is clearly shown if we look at the Adopting Act, discussed in the previous chapter. Flexibility in the form of subscription to the confession of faith was not all it accomplished. It also defined the church's relation to the state.

When the Westminster Confession had been drawn up, the idea was that it would be used in all three kingdoms—England, Ireland, and Scotland—and it contained clauses giving the state power to make it that and to suppress heresies. This power the Synod of Philadelphia unanimously rejected, specifically denying to the civil power any control over the church, any power to persecute for religion.

Thus it was that our people were able to stand shoulder to shoulder with the Baptists, Quakers, rationalists, and freethinkers like Jefferson, in the fight for religious liberty through the disestablishment of state churches.

This fight first centered in New York, where the Makemie case had already thrown a strong light upon its significance. Despite

their being outnumbered forty to one by other sects, the Anglicans there were claiming for themselves the same privileged status they had had at home and using the power of the royal governor to give it to them. Thus, throughout the whole of the colonial period, they were able to deny Presbyterians the right of incorporation, compelling our church to transfer titles of property to the Church of Scotland.

Establishment meant also that only Anglican clergy could perform marriages, and this, too, was naturally resented and opposed.

When the time came that New York Presbyterians wanted to found a college modeled on the College of New Jersey and the Anglicans insisted that it had to be an institution attached to their church, there was more bitter feeling. A wealthy lawyer, William Livingston, member of one of the first families in the colony, took up the challenge, starting one of the first newssheets in America, *The Independent Reflector*, to propagate his views. His venture in crusading journalism failed, but his arguments against clergymen acting as college trustees and teaching sectarian religion were effective, with the result that King's College, the future Columbia University, was a more liberal institution from its birth than it would otherwise have been.

#### SAMUEL DAVIES

Thus far, Presbyterianism had made very little progress anywhere in the South. It is true that it had had a continuous existence in South Carolina since 1687, but the fact that, from Virginia on down, the settlements were royal colonies with state churches put an effective crimp in their efforts to carry the gospel and organize churches of their own. Virginia, in particular, was an Anglican preserve in which everything possible was done to hamper the activities of dissenting preachers who tried to enter its bounds. Only a few harbingers of the revival, like William Robinson, had been allowed any preaching liberty at all prior to that year, 1747, when Samuel Davies, fresh from his Log College graduation and full of zeal for the great cause the Awakening represented, came knocking on the door of the capital of the Old Dominion in Williamsburg, demanding admittance.

Samuel Davies is a shining figure in our story, singularly attractive in his combination of evangelical fervor, solid patriotism, civic mindedness, devotion to the whole cause of God's Kingdom. He was 24 when he came as a missionary from the New Castle Presbytery in Delaware, but already the disease that was to end his life within 15 years had put its mark upon him. It is almost incredible what he was able to accomplish in that short span of time, so far exceeding what most of us do in a full lifetime.

He showed his quality at once by the way he went about obtaining his required license to preach. It so happened that at the moment he petitioned for it the governor had just issued a proclamation in council denouncing the New Side ministers. At the same time the General Court of the colony was taking proceedings against dissenting ministers holding services illegally in private houses.

Davies emerged from the capital not with one license to build a meetinghouse, but with four ; later he was given three more !

The generosity cost the Anglicans plenty—far too much in their estimation, for they regretted it as soon as they became aware of the huge inroads into their preserve that followed Davies wherever he preached, and strong pressure began to bear on the government to revoke the licenses. Davies, knowing, like Francis Makemie, his legal rights, refused to be intimidated. He made his appeal to London and went on preaching. His appeal was upheld.

Evangelism was not Davies' only interest. He also was vitally concerned with the young College of New Jersey. One summer he and Gilbert Tennent made the long voyage across the Atlantic to raise money for the institution. They visited both England and Scotland and stayed nearly two years. Their money-raising efforts were highly successful. While in England Davies attended also to the matter of obtaining more freedom for dissenters in Virginia.

He returned in time for the great emergency that struck the colony in that summer of 1755. Braddock's defeat in July laid the colony wide open to attack by the Indians and terror swept it as the redskin raids penetrated deeper and deeper. The governor

sounded a call for volunteers to defend the menaced settlements. Davies answered the call with all the ardor of his Celtic nature. Throwing himself into recruiting, he summoned people to stand firm in "the patriotism of true religion."

One particularly effective sermon, on "The curse of cowardice," was preached at a general muster of militia in Hanover County. Until Davies delivered it, recruiting had lagged; when he concluded, the recruiting officer had more volunteers on his hands than he knew what to do with.

In the course of the sermon the preacher had prophetically pointed to "that heroic youth Colonel Washington" and expressed the belief that Providence had preserved him for some important service.

Among those who came under the spell of this man's eloquence was young Patrick Henry. American patriotism was indeed in the making when Samuel Davies preached. Love of liberty and love of country with him went hand in hand.

The capstone on Samuel Davies' work came with the organization of Hanover Presbytery, with himself as its first moderator (1755). Hanover Presbytery marked the real beginning of Presbyteranism in our country's Southland.

The year in which victory crowned British arms by Wolfe's capture of Quebec saw Davies called to the presidency of the College of New Jersey, but he was dead within two years, at the age of 38.

#### MISSIONS TO THE INDIANS

Meanwhile, the Awakening continued, contributing greatly to the rise of religious liberty and individualism in our country. Almost for the first time, Christianity now became popular, not just a concern of the clergy. Thousands were won for the churches, even if the estimate of 50,000 must be considered an exaggeration. With the increase in church membership came increased lay activity and leadership. Separation of church and state, let us not forget, only became possible when enough laymen qualified themselves to take an active role in the government of both. All this contributed tremendously to the growth and strengthening of

Presbyterianism. Only now did Presbyterian churches everywhere have fully organized sessions of elders—laymen—sharing in the government of the church.

Wider humanitarian interests, too, made their appearance. Conspicuous among them were missions to the Indians. Jonathan Edwards, the Great Awakening's intellectual giant, after leaving his pulpit at Northampton, joined an Indian mission school that had been set up at Stockbridge, Massachusetts; he left it only when prevailed upon to become president of the College of New Jersey.

The pioneer American missionaries to the Indians were the Brainerds, David and John. David was ordained for this work by the Presbytery of New York in 1744. After his death, his brother John carried on his work. When the Synod of New York had collections made for him, John Brainerd may be said to be the first foreign missionary supported by our church, for work among the Indians was then considered "foreign."

Samuel Kirkland was a student at Princeton. After graduation he went 200 miles on snowshoes into the wilderness of the upper Mohawk Valley, to work with the Oneidas. His devoted work of forty years among them has been credited with keeping the entire Oneida nation neutral during the War of Independence.

The Presbytery of New York even persuaded the Scots, through their Society for Propagating Christian Knowledge, to send missionaries to the Indians, and some fruitful work resulted, especially on Long Island.

The College of New Jersey, however, had the misfortune of losing several presidents by death in quick succession. Edwards died within a month of his installation. It was, therefore, a day of special rejoicing for the college when John Witherspoon of Edinburgh was persuaded to accept the presidency.

This was just another of Samuel Davies' many benefactions to his country; it was he who while visiting in Scotland had "discovered" the eminent Scottish minister.

When Witherspoon landed, the whole student body was on hand to escort him in triumph to Nassau Hall. In a very real sense, the stage was now set for Presbyterianism's big contribution to the winning of the War of Independence and the making of the Union.

“THE BISHOPS ARE COMING”

As the revolution approached, the struggle for liberty came to center on one issue above all others: the attempt, ceaselessly pursued, of the Anglicans to get the home government to appoint bishops for the colonies.

This was something that our forebears fought with almost fanatical vigor. The reason has been given in these pages. If we ignore the circumstances, it would be easy to depict their opposition as bigoted and unreasonable. Anglican bishops were still those lordly prelates whose expensive establishments were borne on the tax payers' shoulders, and whose power reached down into areas of life far beyond the ecclesiastical. Nobody expected colonial bishops to be satisfied with a lesser status than their compeers at home.

This was therefore a serious issue indeed. No institution for our forefathers spelled more certain and more hateful tyranny. Public hysteria became inevitable as reports and rumors spread that the institution was about to be brought to America. Years before Paul Revere rode through the night shouting his famous warning, “The redcoats are coming,” pulpits and newspapers resounded with the cry, “The bishops are coming.”

John Adams insisted that the impending struggle did not involve just a matter of taxation without representation, but our whole heritage of civil and religious liberty, and surely he was not wrong in this belief; for almost certainly a British victory would have brought, as one of its consequences, an intolerant church establishment.

It is just possible, too, that the course of history itself might have been different if the British government *had* yielded to the earnest pleas and appointed bishops. With their political weight thrown into the scales the flame of rebellion might never have been effectively lighted. It is certainly significant that those who most feared the colonists' independent spirit were the most vehement in pleading for bishops. The Church of England, they argued, instilled into its people principles of loyal submission, so no rebellion was to be feared if, with the addition of bishops to rule it, the church could be strongly established.

Many Anglican laymen, it should be remembered, were not Tories but wholehearted patriots like Patrick Henry, providing many signers of the Declaration of Independence.

JOHN WITHERSPOON

How far, then, should the revolt be considered, as it was called at the time, a "Presbyterian Rebellion"?

One reason it was dubbed this is that America had "run off with a Presbyterian parson"! The name of that parson, of course, is John Witherspoon, president of Princeton.

The distinction was more than he earned, or any one man, or a score of men for that matter. Even if we add all Presbyterians in America together, we are far from locating the only source of the rebellion. But at least, the label suggests how greatly Witherspoon impressed his contemporaries and the enormous repute he gained, especially in the enemy's camp.

Witherspoon's earlier activities in Scotland had clearly marked him as a champion of religious liberty, an opponent of state interference. He did, however, surprise everyone by the speed and eagerness with which he plunged into the thick of the political battle; less than eight years elapsed between his arrival as an immigrant and his signature—the only clergyman's—upon the Declaration.

We can note here that eleven other Presbyterians, all laymen, signed it too.

Witherspoon's ardor for liberty imbued the student body at Princeton, so that the college became a hotbed of patriotism. It also imbued the several committees of the Continental Congress on which he served. He performed all manner of services during the war, and the British recognized his outstanding part against them by burning him in effigy along with the generals, Washington, Putnam, and Lee.

Few native Americans have served their nation with as much zeal and devotion as this transplanted Scot did his adopted land. On the monument erected to his memory in our nation's capital are these words taken from the speech he made when he signed the Declaration:

"For my own part, of property I have some, of reputation more. That reputation is staked, that property is pledged, on the issue of the contest; and although these gray hairs must soon descend into the sepulchre, I would infinitely rather that they descend thither by the hand of the executioner than desert at this crisis the sacred cause of my country."

#### THE PRESBYTERIAN CONTRIBUTION

The first ecclesiastical organization in America openly to recognize the Declaration of Independence and align itself with the cause of freedom was the Presbytery of Hanover.

With the official blessing of their church courts, Presbyterians of all kinds and from every racial background crowded the patriot ranks. Few Tories could be found among them. Even Presbyterian ministers actively engaged themselves. Many left their pulpits the better to serve their country. Some served as chaplains, others in the ranks. When the war moved south, it was the men of the back country, in Virginia and the Carolinas, where so many of the Scotch-Irish had settled, who provided the backbone for the army. Those amazing military victories of King's Mountain and Cowpens were won by undisciplined militia troops, composed of men from these parts commanded by Presbyterian elders. Everyone recognized that there along the frontier lay the greatest strength of General Washington's army both in numbers and in morale. Light-Horse Harry Lee dubbed the Pennsylvania Line, the Continental Army's most famous unit, the Irish Line. And Washington once said, in a moment of near despair, that if all his plans should be overturned and he had only a single standard left, he would plant it upon the Blue Ridge, that central point of Scottish settlement, there to make his Thermopylae.

The redcoats knew this too, as they showed by the special treatment they gave to Presbyterian church property wherever they had the chance. Some fifty meetinghouses or more were burned.

After the war a pastoral letter went to all the churches congratulating them on "the general and almost universal attachment of the Presbyterian body to the cause of liberty and the rights of mankind. This has been visible in their conduct and has been con-



fessed by the complaints and resentment of the common enemy. Our burnt and wasted churches and our plundered dwellings are but an earnest of what we must have suffered had they prevailed."

For a church that could not have numbered more than 14,000 communicant members, the American Revolution can only be regarded an extraordinary achievement.

#### RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Nothing can be more barren and impermanent than a military victory. The success of the Revolution lay not in the surrender at Yorktown but in what went into the making of a new nation before, during, and after the fighting. The Union was created by ideas, not weapons. The Presbyterian contribution here was no less than it had been in the war. First in importance was the matter of religious freedom. The revolution would have been in vain if this had not been taken care of and written into the title-deeds of the new nation. This was accomplished in the first ten amendments to the Constitution known as the Bill of Rights. But first there had to be an earlier victory, on the historic battlefield of Virginia.

As though to symbolize that victory, and certainly to garner the fruits of it when won, a noteworthy event had occurred in that state in the very year that independence had been declared: the founding of Hampden-Sydney College.

Named for two heroes of England's earlier struggle for the rights of man, John Hampden and Algernon Sydney, and the first non-sectarian institution of higher learning in the South—the only other college being William and Mary which was dominated by the established church—Hampden-Sydney opened its doors on New Year's Day, 1776. Founded for the express purpose of preparing citizens for the service of the state, its first president, Samuel Stanhope Smith, defined its purpose as "to form good men and good citizens on the common and universal principles of morality, distinguished from the narrow tenets which formed the complexion of any sect."

Nine months later, on October 7, the Old Dominion's General Assembly met under its brand new republican constitution. Among the first questions up for decision was whether the new state would continue to have a state church supported by public funds. This produced a tremendous conflict, the severest he had ever

been in, said Thomas Jefferson, leader in the fight for abolition. A flood of petitions against "spiritual tyranny" poured in. But while most Virginians were by this time dissenters, with Presbyterians the most numerous, the legislature was still controlled by the Anglicans. Some real persuasion was needed before they would consent to surrender their church's cherished position.

After this issue was disposed of, another arose over whether there should be a general tax assessment for the aid of religion—in other words, should the state support all the churches, not merely one particular church?

The greatest support James Madison received in opposing this form of taxation came from the Hanover Presbytery.

It is instructive for our own day to see just how far the conservative and orthodox people of our church had gone in embracing the principle of complete separation of church and state, especially in the light of all that we read today about the need of keeping this a "Christian country" by not prohibiting prayers or Bible readings in the public schools.

The memorial from the Hanover Presbyterians contained these words: "In this enlightened age, and in a land where all, of every denomination, are united in the most strenuous efforts to be free, we hope and expect that our representatives will cheerfully concur in removing every species of religious, as well as civil bondage. Certain it is, that every argument for civil liberty, gains additional strength when applied to liberty in the concerns of religion; and there is no argument in favor of establishing the Christian religion, but what may be pleaded with equal propriety for establishing the tenets of Mahomed by those who believe the Alcoran: or if this be not true, it is at last impossible for the magistrate to adjudge the right of preference among the various sects that profess the Christian faith, without erecting a chair of infallibility, which would lead us back to the Church of Rome."\*

Many guns were fired in the war of words that raged in Virginia on that issue but none had greater effect than this of the Presbyterians.

At last the great principle was established that churches must

\* H. Shelton Smith, Robert T. Handy, Lefferts A. Loetscher, *American Christianity*, Vol. I: 1607-1820 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1960), p. 442.

depend entirely on the voluntary giving of their members for their own support—than which no more probable cause can be found for the greater vitality today of American churches as compared to those of Europe.

The Presbyterians helped greatly to achieve this solution in Virginia but they still had to convince the country at large that they were not, now that independence was gained, going to use it to seek any special privilege for themselves, that church establishments were truly something that they abhorred and rejected in all cases and on fundamental principles.

Perhaps if anything proved conclusively that a new day of freedom had dawned, it was the emphatic way they did now reject the whole idea. Their highest court, the Synod of New York and Philadelphia, at its first meeting after the war, gave a solemn pledge to the world that it renounced the entire principle of intolerance: "We do believe that every member of civil society ought to be protected in the full and free exercise of their religion."

#### THE CONSTITUTION

You hear it often stated—and as often denied by the best authorities!—that the makers of the American Constitution merely imitated our Presbyterian form of representative government. Denominational pride has led us into making many false, or at least exaggerated, claims, especially for the part we took in the founding of our nation, and this is one of them. Representative government was *not* a Presbyterian invention!

However, a modified form of the claim can be defended: namely, that a school of political thought, of which the Reformed faith and Presbyterianism were an influential part, won here its most conspicuous triumph.

For want of a better name, we call this school Calvinist, and the name is not inappropriate inasmuch as we can trace so many of its origins to John Calvin.\* Something, indeed, very wonderful had been happening in America in the nearly two centuries since the

\* The author has devoted an entire book to tracing and elucidating that connection in his *Foundation of American Freedom* (New York and Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1955).

first settlements, a marvelous blending of ideas, some religious in origin, through the Puritans, some secular, through Locke and the philosophers of the Enlightenment; so that when the hour struck for the birth of our nation, our leaders found they could agree on how to create its constitution, even though they were initiating the boldest and most novel experiment ever undertaken, because its cement could be reduced to one word: Freedom.

Calvinism, diluted and undiluted, was the common denominator binding together Presbyterians, Congregationalists, Baptists, Episcopalians, yes, and even many rationalists and humanists: some 90 percent, it has been claimed, of the people of America at that time.

We Presbyterians can claim a little more. First, because we brought so many of these people together, giving a sense of oneness to people of diverse racial stocks, from widely separated parts of the country, uniting them in one church. Second, because we founded the school where, as nowhere else, these ideas were taught and cherished. It is no accident at all that Caleb Wallace, the clerk of the Hanover Presbytery who drew up the memorial for religious freedom in Virginia, and James Madison, the recognized father of the Constitution, and no fewer than eight other drafters of that document, were all alumni of Princeton; for truly that college was, as it has been called, the nation's first training school in political science.

The Presbyterians set their own ecclesiastical capstone in place at the same place and time as the nation's leaders. The first General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of the United States was organized in 1788 and met in Philadelphia in May of the following year.

The relationship between the two events was not one of cause and effect; but it was at least a more than accidental coincidence—and a most appropriate one. And it was also most appropriate that the first Moderator of the nationally organized church, the first in the nation, should have been John Witherspoon.

## *Chapter XIII*

# CALL OF THE FRONTIER

Wars and revolutions have an unhinging effect on men's faith and are usually followed by spiritual depressions. The aftermath of the American Revolution was no exception. President Timothy Dwight of Yale, surveying the national scene at the turn of the century, found only a cold and contemptuous indifference toward every moral and religious subject, a great increase of profaneness of language, drunkenness, gambling, and lewdness.

If this was the condition of the more settled parts of the country after having enjoyed organized religious life for a century and more, we can imagine what it was like elsewhere. The pipelines of religion, morality, culture, even literacy, stopped well short of the frontier.

The direction from which the first great challenge came to our national church is plain—it came from the West, from the backwoods of the wilderness beyond the frontier which had for so long stretched along the mountain ranges of the Appalachians. Even while the revolution was being fought in the east, thousands of men were breaking through that chain, sweeping ever westward in their unappeasable hunger for land. As Daniel Boone was leading his first company of settlers through the Cumberland Gap, the churches of Virginia were taking up their first collections to send Bibles and missionaries into the new territory.

The first to venture into the wilderness was the militant parson Charles Cummings, who spent more than thirty years in the mountains of southwest Virginia and eastern Tennessee. We can still vividly picture him, putting on his shot pouch, shouldering his rifle, mounting his dun stallion, and riding off to his next stopping place, there to meet in a clearing in the forest a handful of people, all equipped like himself, each with rifle close to hand.

One spring, two young men, Charles Beatty and George Duffield, set out on such a preaching mission. They crossed the Blue Ridge Mountains from Carlisle, then the Tuscarora, finally arriving at Fort Pitt, the future Pittsburgh. Thence they entered Indian country and made an unsuccessful attempt to bring the gospel to the Indians. On their return, however, they reported great enthusiasm among the settlers, and this gave the churches back east the green light to press ahead, even though by this time the Revolutionary War was raging.

Soon Samuel Doak, graduate of Princeton, was pushing over the mountains, to be followed shortly by David Rice. One went to Tennessee, the other to Kentucky. A growing stream followed. First, one presbytery was organized, then another. Then, there were 26 ministers in Kentucky alone; and the time had come to form a synod out of the three presbyteries there. And so the story went on and on, in ever growing sequence.

John McMillan is one of the most famous of these early pioneers. A native Pennsylvanian and a graduate of Princeton, he made the decision to work on the frontier the year of national independence. Taking his wife and baby with him, he made the long perilous journey out, and this is what he found when he reached his destination:

"When I came to this country the cabin in which I was to live was raised, but there was no roof on it, nor any chimney or floor. The people, however, were very kind, assisting me in preparing my house, and on the 16th of December I moved into it. But we had neither bedstead, nor tables, nor stool, nor chair, nor bucket. All these things we had to leave behind us, there being no wagon road at that time over the mountains; we could bring nothing with us but what was carried on pack-horses. We placed two boxes on each other, which served us for a table, and two kegs answered for seats; and having committed ourselves to God in family worship, we spread a bed on the floor, and slept soundly till morning. The next day, a neighbor coming to my assistance, we made a table and a stool, and in a little time had everything comfortable about us. Sometimes, indeed, we had no bread for weeks together, but we had plenty of pumpkins and potatoes, and all the necessities of life; as for luxuries, we were not much concerned about them.

We enjoyed health, the gospel and its ordinances, and pious friends. We were in the place we believed God would have us to be; and we did not doubt but that He would provide for us everything necessary; and (glory to His name!) we were not disappointed."

John McMillan was an eloquent preacher of the old school. As Jonathan Edwards had taught that generation of preachers to do, he dwelled much on the awful danger confronting the sinner exposed to the wrath of God. But he earned himself the honor of being singled out as the father of Western Presbyterianism. When he was joined by other Princetonians—Thaddeus Dod, James Power, Joseph Smith—he was able to organize the first presbytery west of the mountains, Redstone, just one month before Yorktown. At 29 he was its first moderator besides being its youngest member.

How primitive frontier conditions were is hard for us today to fully realize. It was the day of the circuit rider, the itinerant preacher. The evangelists were so comparatively few, distances so vast, roads so non-existent, that they had to spread themselves terrible thin, merely, as they said, to keep alive a sense of religion among the inhabitants and preserve them from falling into a state of heathenism. They were seldom able to preach in any community more than once or twice on their long circuits.

Many settlements would not yet have built themselves a meetinghouse and the preaching would be in the open. When the preacher had located a settlement where there was a sufficient nucleus to support a minister, he would call the future congregation together and get them to appoint a day for the construction of a meetinghouse. Between sunup and sundown on that day, by dint of all working together wielding their axes, the "church," the roughest sort of log structure, would be completed.

As soon as a congregation was organized, a session of ruling elders would be formed, whose main function would be, as in the Scottish tradition, to administer discipline in the community. The records show that the chief offenses dealt with were immorality and drunkenness, but lawlessness, rowdiness, Sabbath-breaking, gambling, swearing, and fighting came in for their share of attention. Everything, in fact, points to conditions on this, our first fron-

tier, being precisely what they have been on each of our subsequent frontiers.

The problem of our church was to find enough men willing to work under these trying conditions. They were just not to be had. When in one year the General Assembly commissioned 51 workers for the frontier, besides asking synods and presbyteries to supply vacant churches, the number of churches that had no ministers was three times as great as those that had.

The support of the preachers was a problem in itself. The people among whom they worked were desperately poor, yet the preachers were almost entirely dependent on them. It was not always their congregation's fault when promises of support were not fulfilled. Usually, the preacher had to supplement his meager income by farming or teaching. Often he would be paid in produce, not in cash.

Especially, there were just not enough men of really high character required for this exacting kind of ministry. Of the first 50 men to go as preachers to Kentucky, we read, nearly half were "subjected to church censures more or less severe; several being cut off for heresy or schism, two deposed for intemperance, one suspended for licentiousness, several rebuked for wrangling, and others for other improprieties unbecoming the gravity or dignity of the clerical character."

#### THE PLAN OF UNION

Providentially, another baptism of the Spirit came to the aid of those trying to make a Christian people of the new nation. The revival that swept the country at the turn of the century is as much a landmark in our history as the earlier one known as the Great Awakening. Missions both home and abroad received from it an impetus that, while it has slowed down from time to time, is still going strong today. The great world-wide mission movement, that has taken evangelists into practically every land where Christ was not known, began at this time.

The outstanding feature of this movement was its interdenominational character. The denominations were not organized then as we know them today; they were still in their formative stages. Mission-



minded Christians formed voluntary societies composed of all who shared their concern. Thus, the first American missionary society formed in New York was composed of Presbyterians, Baptists, and our Presbyterian cousins of the Dutch and Associate Reformed churches.

Another difference between then and now can be noted. The enthusiasm for missions was church-wide. Missions were not thought of merely as a segment of the church's work represented in our church budgets as receiving a portion, usually rather small, of our giving. The church and its mission were considered as one and the same, inseparable in fact as it was in their minds.

This was demonstrated by the Presbyterians in the newly settled region of Pittsburgh. Here they formed a Western Missionary Society to give organized expression to their ardor for spreading the gospel, and they did so on the basis that the society represented the whole church, and every member of it was considered automatically a member of their society.

When our missionaries crossed the old frontier and began following the settlers into central and western New York, they met Congregational Church missionaries coming the same way from New England. Having this new spirit of co-operation their leaders had no difficulty agreeing to work together. So a Plan of Union was adopted (1801), by which new congregations as they were formed could be connected with both denominations at the same time, served by pastors of either one, and represented in the ruling bodies of both.

The Plan worked extremely well, especially if the size of the resulting harvest of converts and new members is the criterion of judgment. In the period of greatest national growth, between 1800 and 1840, while our population more than tripled, the membership of our church increased four times faster, from 13,000 to 226,000.

When that keen French observer Alexis de Tocqueville visited the United States in 1831, he stated that there was no country in the world in which the Christian religion retained a greater influence than in America. He listed religion as the foremost institution of our country.

One weakness of the Plan of Union which led to its ultimate undoing, however, was that it stopped short of its proper conclusion, an actual merger of the two churches. The differences between the denominations could have been ironed out while the spirit of co-operation was still strong, and the fervor for carrying the gospel still uppermost in the hearts of those who professed Christ.

Perhaps, this was the golden moment when it might have been possible to nip in the bud the denominationalism that so soon became such a marked feature of America's religious life, whose evils we are today still trying to eradicate through bodies like the National Council of the Churches of Christ in America and our local church federations.

Our church went on record at the time as heartily approving this co-operative effort. It expressed this approval in a pastoral letter which went to all our churches from the General Assembly of 1817: "We are persuaded that all those periods and churches which have been favored with special revivals of religion have also been distinguished by visible union and concert in prayer. We entreat you, brethren, to cherish this union and concert."

#### WHITMAN AND JACKSON

Two men in particular answered resoundingly the call of the frontier in the course of this century of national growth: Marcus Whitman and Sheldon Jackson.

The pioneering of Marcus Whitman among the earliest mountain men on the Oregon Trail has given him an imperishable place in the saga of the West. He and his bride, the vivacious blonde Narcissa, set out on the trail with another couple, the Spaldings, as agents for the American Foreign Mission Board to serve among the Indians. Their going (1836) was in response to a plea for help that had reached the Board via a delegation.

Whitman, as skilled a doctor as he was a dedicated missionary, removed on the way an arrowhead from the back of the famous mountainman Jim Bridger and battled successfully with the cholera that struck his party. Then, for twelve years, in the mission among the Cayuses at Waailatpu, he preached and taught and treated the Indians' various diseases. But they were a superstitious

tribe, and the day came, in the middle of a catastrophic measles epidemic brought in by passing emigrant trains, when the Cayuses, deciding that the Whitmans were sorcerers, massacred them both.

Presbyterians were in the front rank in every pioneer activity on the Pacific coast. The first Protestant minister to settle in California after the Gold Rush of '48 was a Presbyterian, as was the first missionary to be commissioned for California, and the first regional organization of a church when the Presbytery of San Francisco was formed on September 21, 1849.

When the whole continent had been opened for settlement from coast to coast and emigrant trains were crowding the trails and the last spikes of the railroad were about to be driven, Sheldon Jackson appeared, the man who, most clearly, insistently, dramatically, heard the call of the West and took the responsibility upon himself to minister to it.

Jackson made his home mission province nothing less than the entire country west of the Mississippi. In 1869, when he began his great work, there was not a single Presbyterian church between Omaha and Sacramento along the line of the Union and Central Pacific Railroads. The whole vast area lay within the bounds of the single frontier presbytery of the Missouri River. The supplying of ministers and the planting of churches in strategic locations along this line of future growth became Sheldon Jackson's passion, in which he proved himself a man of prodigious energy. His resourcefulness in raising the money and finding the men he needed was boundless, even though his zeal at times outran his discretion. Many Presbyterian churches in places like Fremont, Grand Island (Nebraska), Cheyenne, Laramie, Rawlins, owe their beginning to his efforts.

When he had finished this labor, he went on to the biggest work of his life, in Alaska, where he was both missionary and state superintendent of schools, appointed by the federal government. He devoted himself especially to the needs of the Eskimos, making worldwide fame by being the man who, to meet their dire need of food, introduced the domesticated Siberian reindeer—one of the most successful experiments of its kind ever undertaken.

It has been calculated that Sheldon Jackson's total mileage, in the course of 50 years of constant journeying, was not far short of a million. He made 26 trips to Alaska alone. In 1897 a grateful church elected him moderator of the General Assembly.

#### CONTRIBUTION TO EDUCATION AND LEARNING

Far more, however, was involved in our church's hearing the call of the frontier than the sending of missionaries and the organization of new churches. They were only the beginning, the advance agents so to speak, of Presbyterianism's abiding concern for the welfare of the nation and the future of the Christian faith in it. Equally as important is what it did for education and the spread of learning and culture. The leaders in this field came from its ranks, especially in the South.

A fact of history easily overlooked is that in the Southern colonies, unlike Puritan New England, there were no public schools. The English who settled there, with their more aristocratic ideas of government, reserved education for their own privileged class and opposed free schools supported by taxation. This is what gives point and meaning to the action of our church when the Synod of New York and Philadelphia, in 1785, enjoined on all congregations a special regard to the education of children by establishing schools. If no heed had been paid to this injunction, part of our nation would have remained illiterate, making our democracy little more than a myth and an illusion. But heed was paid, so much in fact that, until about the middle of the last century, the Presbyterian was the dominant influence in education.

All along the advancing frontier, schools were planted beside the meetinghouses. The first free schools in the mountain and hill country of Virginia and the Carolinas came via the Presbyterians. David Rice established the first grammar school in Kentucky. The first Sunday schools were started to meet the urgent need of combating illiteracy, their original purpose being no more than to teach children to read; they were soon seen, however, to be an ineffective makeshift. The struggle then shifted to getting the several states to provide public schools. This was a struggle, indeed, because of the opposition of the wealthy planters and slaveholders,

and the indifference of the masses. Even well into the century, half the children in this big section of the country were receiving no schooling at all. It was not until as late as the Civil War that Virginia organized its first state association of schools.

Wherever we look we see the same picture: Presbyterian preachers, teachers, church papers, battling to get something done to correct a deplorable situation.

In secondary education it was the same story. What little there was of it was dominated by Presbyterians, both along the Atlantic seaboard and in the newer states of Kentucky and Tennessee, through the early decades of the nineteenth century. Princeton was for all this period the religious and educational capital of Scotch-Irish America. "The graduate of Nassau Hall invaded the South with the Bible in one hand and the Greek or Latin textbook in the other."\*

Log colleges or academies, modeled upon that famous original of William Tennent, sprang up in many places, and out of many of them grew permanent colleges, like Davidson in North Carolina.

Perhaps the most famous of these was one established by David Caldwell, Princeton graduate, near Greensboro, North Carolina. Caldwell supported himself by farming to supplement his meager income as a schoolmaster. He was a strong patriot; in 1775 the British offered a reward of one thousand dollars for him dead or alive. As a member of the state convention, he helped to frame North Carolina's first constitution and to adopt the United States Constitution. He taught in his Log College for 50 years, only retiring in 1822 at the age of 95. Among his students, numbering some 60 a year, were some of the South's most eminent citizens, including five governors.

Another academy of note was Moses Waddel's Willington in Georgia, which produced John C. Calhoun and William H. Crawford, two of the most distinguished men in Southern history. "No schoolmaster in the South and few in the nation," says Dr. Thompson, "had a more distinguished list of graduates over an equal period of time."†

\* Ernest Trice Thompson, *Presbyterians in the South*, Vol. One (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1963), p. 245.

† *Ibid.*, p. 247.

Through these early academies, the tradition of liberal arts colleges, with the training they provided for the public life and professions of our country, became established.

American Calvinists were responsible for most of the colleges and universities that were founded in the first century of our national life. No fewer than 51 have been counted as descendants of the original Log College. And the second Great Awakening of the early 1800's led to many more. Presbyterians set the pattern for establishing denominational colleges, but also led in establishing state-supported institutions, like the University of North Carolina, the University of Georgia, the University of Tennessee, the University of Indiana.

The story of the University of Pittsburgh is typical. Chartered as Pittsburgh Academy in 1787, its incorporators being five Presbyterian ministers, four of them Princeton graduates, associated with them being 14 laymen, the college was reincorporated as a state university thirty-two years later, with a charter providing that there should be no religious tests for either faculty or students.

The Plan of Union was particularly fruitful, ten colleges being established in the belt of the country north of the Ohio where Presbyterian and Congregational streams merged. By the time the Civil War broke out no fewer than 43 such institutions can be counted in 15 states east of the Mississippi and five in states west of the river.

In a word, thanks to the way the Ulster Scots had distributed themselves along the entire border of our country, and the passion for education they had inherited from Calvin, Knox, and their Scottish forebears in the homeland, the Presbyterians were as powerful a force in the education as in the religious life of the new nation.

## *Chapter XIV*

# TORN BY MANY SCHISMS

The church had stormy seas to navigate in the course of the 19th century. Even with the best Christian spirit it might not have been able to meet the tough issues and bitter controversies of the period without being torn apart. The intellectual atmosphere was no more propitious for Christian harmony than a century earlier. With the recession of the tide of Awakening had come a resurgence of orthodoxy. Stress was once more being laid on doctrine and creed rather than on vital Christian experience and behavior. As the sectarian spirit grew, so charges of heresy and un-Presbyterian conduct became rife. Conservatism was firmly at the helm, rendering any deviation from its demands of conformity suspect, and it was a bad time for liberals. With cries of dissension, strife, and division filling the air, it was a worse time still for Christian-minded people generally.

It was doubly unfortunate for the peace and harmony of our church that at that moment an opposite trend should have appeared on the frontier, where the new nation of democracy was taking shape under the leadership of Andrew Jackson, for this new nation was as much geared to increased freedom as the people in the east were to less of it.

Westerners were demanding a different kind of preaching than Princeton graduates were able to give them: less cold and intellectual, less concerned with proving points in theology, and more attuned to meeting those human needs which under frontier conditions were often so desperate. Above all, they wanted preaching aimed at changing lives, bringing men to Christ.

It was natural that their view of revivals, like the one that had just swept across their lonely settlements, was more favorable than

that of the sophisticated city dwellers of the East. The second Awakening had been accompanied by the same "extravagant and indecent outrages against Christian decorum," as the first—and perhaps, in the more primitive conditions of the backwoods, the excesses had been even greater.

The men on the frontier were particularly impatient with the high standards of education required by our church for all its ministers. They wanted the standard lowered so as to increase the supply of ministers to take care of the tremendous needs they saw all around them.

Our church has always been proud of its high standards of education, and rightly so. There was, therefore, a natural reluctance to see them lowered for any cause. Nor was there any lack of awareness of the need of education. When the great Boston preacher Lyman Beecher left his comfortable city pulpit to take the presidency of Lane Seminary, just opened out West, his cry, "We must educate, we must educate—or we must perish by our own prosperity," was echoed on every hand. Three seminaries, Princeton, Auburn, and Lane, were founded by our church in quick succession to take care of the needs of the rapidly expanding nation.

Obviously, there would be some hesitation and doubt about granting the demands of the Tennesseans and Kentuckians. The situation called for full discussion, looking toward a reasonable compromise. But only lack of sympathy and understanding of the Westerners' situation could have caused the flat rejection of their demands.

In a tragic and needless split, which greater love and understanding and a less rigid attitude on the part of leaders could have averted, since no really fundamental issues were involved, the men of Kentucky, rebuffed by their own church, walked out and formed a new one, the Cumberland Presbyterian Church.

The consequences were especially tragic because our church was bereft of its most ardent, Christ-filled segment at the very moment when it should have been uniting all its efforts to bring in the waiting harvest of souls. It paid the price of its own folly by seeing the severed branch grow twice as fast as the parent tree in the years that followed, and the Methodists and the Baptists, with



their own lower standards of education, overtake, and soon pass, the Presbyterians in numbers—a position that, of course, they still hold today.

#### OLD SCHOOL VERSUS NEW SCHOOL

The different racial backgrounds had much to do with the next schism. The Scots and the Scotch-Irish, located predominantly in Pennsylvania and the South, were still the church's conservatives, standing firmly and rigidly on the Westminster Standards and the letter of Presbyterian law, while the people farther north, in New York state, retained the liberalizing tendencies of New England. The geographical and sectional difference facilitated a split between them. Three-quarters of the presbyteries in the South belonged to the Old School conservatives, as they were called, while New York state was overwhelmingly New School.

The main point at issue was the New School's attachment to the 1801 Plan of Union with the Congregationalists. In the eyes of the Old School, this plan was a "Presbygational monstrosity," which violated their belief that all the work of the church should be conducted by the denomination's own boards. It did not jibe with their concept of what was proper Presbyterianism. Other issues—slavery, subscription, alleged heresies—were also involved.

For some years the two factions remained in a state of uneasy balance, but with the New School generally in control. Then suddenly, in 1837, the Old Schoolmen found themselves with a majority in the General Assembly, and with a style of behavior more befitting politicians than churchmen, they made full use of their opportunity, first by abrogating the Plan of Union as unconstitutional, then by declaring that, being unconstitutional, everything that had been done under it was also unconstitutional and therefore null and void.

Translated into simple statistical fact, this meant that four synods of upper New York, with 533 congregations—most of the fruits of the Plan's 36 years of operation—were struck off the rolls. Over 100,000 church members were told, "You no longer belong to our church!"

The Old School party thought by taking this action they would

bring their opponents to their senses: they would either bring them back into line or drive them into the Congregational fold where they belonged. The Old Schoolers had, however, misjudged the strength of the New Schoolers. The ejected synods did not fold up; instead, claiming to be the victims of unconstitutional procedure, they proceeded to constitute themselves as the rightful church. In consequence, two separate, mutually hostile bodies came into existence, each claiming to be the Presbyterian Church in the United States.

The evil consequences of this scandalous breach of Christian unity and concord can be imagined. A series of lawsuits over property inevitably followed. Co-operation with the Congregationalists came to an end, with resultant bitterness on both sides. The Presbyterians generally lost a great deal of strength, and the golden opportunity to make themselves the dominant church in America slipped through their fingers. The New Schoolers kept alive the ecumenical spirit, while the Old School concentrated on the building up of the denomination itself.

#### THE SLAVERY ISSUE

Nothing has ever come closer to destroying our nation than the institution of chattel slavery, America and freedom being synonymous terms. Nothing, also, has ever come closer to destroying our church, and it is painful now to recall what the "peculiar institution" actually did to it. For one terrible thing slavery did was to act as a moral blinder, proving how easily Christian people can become blind and indifferent to wrong when their own, and their church's, material interests are involved.

A Presbyterian elder, Benjamin Rush, of the Second Church of Philadelphia was the first to denounce slavery in our country; he published a book against slavery in 1773, which went through five editions. He and Benjamin Franklin founded the first abolition society.

Upon coming up in our church courts after the revolution, the issue was usually raised in the form of a question: Could there be Christian communion with slaveholders? The question, first raised by a slave state, was frequently discussed but never re-

solved, as almost at once sectional differences made it impossible for Presbyterians to speak with one voice—or even to speak to each other on this touchy subject!

If our church could have stood on the forthright position it took in 1818, what a glorious thing it would have been! For this was the pronouncement of the General Assembly in that year:

“We consider the voluntary enslaving of one part of the human race by another, as a gross violation of the most precious and sacred rights of human nature; as utterly inconsistent with the law of God, which requires us to love our neighbour as ourselves, and as totally irreconcilable with the spirit and principles of the gospel of Christ, which enjoin that ‘all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them.’ . . . it is manifestly the duty of all Christians who enjoy the light of the present day . . . to use their honest, earnest, and unwearied endeavours . . . as speedily as possible to efface this blot on our holy religion, and to obtain the complete abolition of slavery throughout Christendom, and if possible throughout the world.”

The sentiment on that occasion was nearly unanimous; commissioners from both the South and the North voted together for abolition. But tragically, it was for the last time. The invention of Eli Whitney’s cotton gin had now made slaveholding too profitable a part of the South’s cotton empire for its immorality to outweigh the dollar gain in the scale. The tentacles of the power of wealth slowly strangled men’s sense of sin. And the plain, simple truth of the matter was that the benevolent causes of the church became too dependent on the big money givers, who sat faithfully in the pews on Sunday while working their slaves in the fields the other six days in the week.

Soon slavery was even being viewed and defended as a positive good, to be upheld not with apology but with pride. And when that happened only a bloody, heartbreaking conflict could bring about its eradication from American soil.

Even as late as 1835, however, there was still hope that our church would redeem itself by taking a decisive stand. In regions where Presbyterianism was strongest—in the upper Ohio Valley,

western Pennsylvania, eastern Ohio, and northern West Virginia—sentiment was fiercely anti-slavery. "The signs are truly propitious," wrote one optimist that year. "After a few more convulsions, by the help of God, the victory is ours."

But after that year, silence reigned. The evil had worked its way in too deep for it even to be discussed; the subject became a forbidden one. The pro-slavery party defended their position by citing passages of Scripture which proved that slavery was a universal institution in the ancient world. The majority, taking refuge in the fact that slavery was a legal institution, held to the view that the church had no business interfering with this or any other legal institution or right of property. The conservative view has always been that the church should stick to its knitting, which is the saving of souls, and stay out of social and political issues.

Some Presbyterians salved their consciences by shutting their eyes to the wrong and concentrating on Negro evangelizing and education. "The great duty of the South," cried the voice of Princeton Seminary of that era, Charles Hodge, "is not emancipation but improvement." Work among Negroes for a while was visibly stimulated.

There were, however, those Presbyterians, chiefly among the New School, who were ardent abolitionists and would not keep silence or evade the issue. The abolitionists kept on fiercely demanding to be heard, demanding action, even at the price of schism.

One segment of our church made the way of separation its own choice. The three presbyteries of the Synod of Cincinnati seceded to form the Free Presbyterian Church, built on the conviction that there could be no Christian fellowship with slave holders. When the crisis passed and Abraham Lincoln had by his proclamation of emancipation of January 1863 removed the blot of slavery from America's sacred soil of freedom, the Free Churchmen quietly returned to the fold they had left. But one can say of them that they were heralds of a new day, a new conscience, in our church for, by their forthright act, they recalled their fellow churchmen from moral backsliding; they showed how grave had been the danger of the church's soul being sold for gain.

## THE SCHISM OF 1861

In May 1860 the Presbyterian Church in the United States held its last united General Assembly. It convened as usual the following May, but in the intervening months the war had begun. Fort Sumter had fallen; Lincoln had called for volunteers; ten states had seceded.

Out of 64 Southern presbyteries, only half were represented at the Philadelphia meeting, these chiefly from the border synods. The Deep South was conspicuously missing. The danger of travel could account for many of the absentees.

Patriotic fervor was at its peak as the representatives assembled; it invaded the meeting. The galleries were filled with spectators. The local newspapers followed proceedings with unusual interest, their editors demanding some strong expression by the Presbyterian Church in support of the Union.

The crucial test had come as to whether the church should ever concern itself with a political issue or confine itself, as its conservative elements insisted, to passing judgment on spiritual and ecclesiastical matters.

At first it looked as though the conservatives still safely had the upper hand; but then the emotional atmosphere that surrounded the commissioners had its effect and got the better of their judgment.

The test came when Dr. Gardiner Spring, prominent pastor of the large Brick Presbyterian Church in New York City, introduced resolutions asking the Assembly to call on its churches and ministers to do all in their power in support of the federal government. The committee considering the resolutions strongly recommended their rejection or tabling. Instead of that, they were accepted.

The action was ill-considered. It gave those in the Southern segment of the church who wanted to join the secessionist movement all the reason or pretext they needed to compel their synods to take that step. Their church had now been guilty of a "political deliverance"; this being clearly unconstitutional was cause enough for separation from it.

In retrospect, the action can be seen as foolish because it erected

a needless block in the way of subsequent reunion after the war. From that day onward, the Gardiner Spring Resolutions have been cited as a prime reason why, though the political breach has long since been repaired, that of our church has not.

The Southern Presbyterians proceeded to organize their own church immediately afterward, holding their first General Assembly in Augusta, Georgia, in December 1861. They first called it the Presbyterian Church in the Confederate States; then, after the Union was restored, they changed the name to the Presbyterian Church in the United States, which it still bears.

Separate from the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, but not in any essential differently constituted, was the policy the new denomination adopted, and this has remained its guiding principle. With a few unimportant exceptions, the Southern branch has stayed in line with the mother church, so that today there are few if any valid reasons for continued separation.

Meanwhile, even before the war broke out, the New School Church had its own schism over the slavery issue when its Southern churches broke away to form their own synod. And all this dissension resulted in there being for a short space of time no less than five Presbyterian denominations where, at the beginning of the century, there had been only one.

To complete the picture of division, mention must be made of Presbyterians in America whose separation from the main body predated the foundation of our nation, having their origins in Scotland.

One such splinter group retained their loyalty to the Covenants. Still familiarly known as Covenanters, they adopted the name "Associate Reformed."

Another, somewhat larger group which joined the migration to America, stemmed from the Secession of 1733 which, as described earlier, arose over the issues of patronage and moderation. A rigorous attachment to orthodox Calvinism marked them, keeping them for many years apart from their brethren. They practiced closed communion and insisted on using only the Psalter in worship.

A denomination which took the name "United Presbyterian

Church" resulted from a merger of two of these small Secession groups in 1858. This church showed much vitality in the years that followed, growing from some 50,000 members to nearly a quarter of a million. Its history well exemplified how Presbyterianism's early tendency toward exclusiveness and sectarianism was counteracted and reversed by the growing trend toward catholicity and ecumenicity, which, as we shall see in our final chapter, brought about at last union with the mainstream of Presbyterianism.

## *Chapter XV*

# OUR ECUMENICAL DESTINY

We have reached the last hundred years of our story, and they are by far the most complex. This century, from the 1860's to the 1960's, has seen more revolutionary changes in every area of life than all previous centuries of human existence put together. The changes wrought by industrialism, science, and technology in increasing production and generating material wealth alone have so profoundly affected our religious life that it is hard to discuss the latter in the same context with what went before. Today, as never before, religion has to convince itself of its own relevance to life, and then it has to struggle to find ways to assert and prove that relevance to its hearers.

We know, for instance, that formalized religion has lost most of its appeal to industrial workers and those at the bottom of the social scale because of its increasing identification with wealth and the upper and middle classes of our society. We Presbyterians have been far more concerned with the problems of drinking and lack of Sunday observance than with the continuance in our affluent society of such evils as slums, racial injustice, unemployment, and illiteracy. And yet, at the same time, the percentage of church membership in the American population has risen from less than 10% in 1800 to some 60% in our own day.

Much of the vital Protestant activity of this century has cut across denominational lines: the Salvation Army, the Young Men's Christian Association, the Young Women's Christian Association, the American Bible Society, the Student Christian Movement. Even while denominational walls were still being erected and denominational organizations expanded and perfected, traditional church divisions were having less hold on people. Thus, we might



continue to work through our own Presbyterian Church channels, but much of our effort would overflow these bounds into wider streams of co-operative Christian work.

We might even go so far as to say that developments *within* our own church have largely ceased to be of primary national importance—part of the mainstream of American Christianity, that is—except on those special occasions when our church through its leadership has stepped into prominence by taking a stand on some issue of national importance. These occasions tend to form, therefore, our chief topics from this point on.

#### EVANGELIZATION OF THE WORLD

The missionary movement of the nineteenth century, called “the Great Century” because it was then that Christianity for the first time became a genuine world religion, was the outgrowth of the revivals that preceded it. The proclamation of the duty of all Christians to share in the conversion of the world was the direct result of the rebirth of religious vitality. No longer was it acceptable thinking that when it pleased God to convert the heathen he would do it without the help of any human! The New Testament command to “preach the gospel to every creature and make disciples of all nations” was the only one that Presbyterians, along with members of the other evangelical churches, now heard. When the pioneering London Missionary Society was formed, it significantly resolved “not to send Presbyterianism or any other form of government, but the glorious Gospel of the Blessed God.”

So, “from Greenland’s icy mountains, from India’s coral strand,” the mighty tide was to sweep into almost every “heathen” corner of the globe.

The crying need felt for a concerted effort in the foreign field had much to do with reconciling Old School and New School Presbyterians and bringing their separated churches together in a happy and harmonious reunion, which took place in 1870. In its first General Assembly the reunited church reaffirmed its dedication to the objective of converting the world.

The separated church of the South did not long remain behind its parent body in enthusiasm. Almost at once its leaders were de-

claring, "We can scarcely set up a claim to be regarded as a true branch of the Church of Christ, or take an honorable place in the sisterhood of evangelical churches, unless we keep this object constantly before our minds." So that, despite all that had to be done to clear up and repair the desolations left by the war, this church was sending its first missionary to China within two years of Ap-pomattox, with more following quickly to Japan and South America. Even when money was at its shortest, debts piled their highest, the cry all for retrenchment, the top priority given to missions got the necessary contributions.

In 1886 a Presbyterian student at Princeton University, Robert T. Wilder, fired with the prevailing enthusiasm, called a conference of students at Mount Harmon, Pennsylvania, as a result of which a hundred students, including that outstanding leader John R. Mott, enlisted for the foreign field.

Out of this initiative of one student grew the international Student Volunteer movement, which took as its watchword "the evangelization of the world in this generation." Wilder and another young Presbyterian, John Forman, toured the colleges and universities of our land seeking recruits. Wilder himself carried the movement to the British Isles.

In this vast and continuing work, which leaves few areas of need today wholly untouched, and which is shared in by Protestants everywhere, the names of four American Presbyterians stand out as worthy of special remembrance: Robert E. Speer, long-time secretary of foreign mission work in his denomination; Sam Higginbottom, missionary to India; John A. Mackay, president of Princeton Seminary; and Frank W. Price, the Southern church's missionary to China.

In this field, too, we demonstrated our church's concern for higher education by having a hand in the founding of some twenty or more such institutions spotted over the earth. Mackenzie College in São Paulo, Brazil; Silliman University in the Philippines; the American University in Cairo; and in India, Forman Christian College at Lahore and the Allahabad Christian College—these, not to mention the many universities in China, are just a few of the institutions that profoundly influenced educational systems in the

lands where they were situated, besides bringing a knowledge of Christian truth and Christian love, expressed through medical science and hospital care.

Today, especially after our servicemen's experiences in World War II, it is possible for us as never before to appreciate the true worth of all this outpouring of dedicated effort, lives, and money. We realize now that it has played an essential part in the creation of that world community on which our hopes for the future so largely rest. We are conscious that our church is no longer a white man's church; our Presbyterianism today belongs as much to the African of Congo or Kenya as it does to the Scot, the Ohioan, or the Carolinian. We are even coming to realize that missions themselves can be a two-way affair, that there is more to them than money and the sending of white men to "darkest Africa," that *they* have much that they can give *us*. Certainly, they can make us more vital and alert Christians, alive to the needs of the world.

In this way, Christianity has in a very true sense become a genuine world religion, knowing no color, having no bounds, recognizing no other center of power but its risen Lord and Savior.

#### THE WORLD PRESBYTERIAN ALLIANCE

Nothing so dramatized the Presbyterian engagement in a world movement as the creation of the World Presbyterian Alliance—or, to give it its full and more meaningful title, the Alliance of Reformed Churches Throughout the World Holding the Presbyterian System.

This happened in 1875. Appropriately, the man who had the most to do with its formation was the president of Princeton University of that day, James McCosh.

Here indeed was a realization of one of Calvin's fondest dreams, preserved to posterity when he wrote Archbishop Cranmer of England that he was ready to cross ten seas, begrudge no labor or trouble, if he could but assist in bringing all the Reformed churches together as one great family of the Christian faith.

The Alliance is such a union. Based solely on the Lordship of Jesus Christ and the acceptance of Scripture as the supreme law, it brings together all the churches in the world that trace their

origin back to Calvin and the Reformation. While still growing, as churches from new emerging nations are added, five years ago, in 1959, when the Alliance held its eighteenth General Council meeting in São Paulo, Brazil, it consisted of no fewer than 78 churches in 53 nations, representing a total of 46 million people. Today (1964), there are 91 members, 47 of which are younger churches—statistics which enable us to gauge the extent to which we of the Reformed faith have become, in little more than a century and a half, a world movement. We are, ourselves, a community of nearly 50 million!

The General Council meets every third or fourth year in different Reform centers. At its meeting in Princeton in 1954, it solemnly renewed the pledge to be ecumenical, in policy, purpose, and outlook. It reaffirmed the Reformed tradition to be the servant of God's redemptive purpose through the wider agency of the church universal.

#### THE AUBURN AFFIRMATION

There was still some unfinished business to be disposed of, however, before American Presbyterians were ready to assume the responsibilities that go with this new status. They still had to free their minds from some dead wood of the past that was now obstructing them in the achievement of their goal, causing continued strife and dissension where there should have been concord and united effort.

They were still greatly troubled over the whole question of what, as Presbyterian Christians, we *must* believe. Still debated, sometimes with fury and intolerance and always with serious earnestness, were such matters as: Is Christianity an assent to certain propositions guaranteed to be true by authority of the church, or is it a personal relationship to God through faith in Jesus Christ? If, for Protestants, the Bible is the supreme authority, does this mean a literal interpretation? Is there error in the Bible, or do we insist on its inerrancy? How far does the Westminster Confession limit freedom of criticism, and should critics who exceed these limits be subject to charges of heresy?

For a long time conservatives, who took the hold-fast side of

these opposing positions, dominated the councils of our church. Their great mouthpiece was the eminent theologian of Princeton Seminary, Charles Hodge, champion par excellence of the inerrancy of Scripture theory. He and his group of supporting scholars gave a very rough reception to the Darwinian theory of evolution when it hit these shores in 1859, as well as to the findings of the so-called higher critics of the Bible that arrived to cause a second intellectual explosion hard on the heels of the first. There was just no disposition in our church, or in any of the Christian churches in America at that time, to tolerate evolutionary views of man's origin, or views of the Bible that treated it as any other human document from the ancient past. Three biblical scholars of great eminence, led by Charles Briggs of Union Seminary in New York, as well as a much respected professor of natural science at Columbia Seminary in Georgia, President Woodrow Wilson's uncle James Woodrow, lost their professorships for daring to harbor and teach these dangerous ideas.

The issues all came to a head in the 1920's. A Baptist minister named Harry Emerson Fosdick was then occupying a Presbyterian pulpit in New York; he became the storm center of attack when he assailed the Fundamentalists, the ultra-conservatives, who thereupon, still holding the power in our church's General Assembly, censured him for his forthrightness and caused him to leave our church.

Upon this, a proposal was made that utterances of General Assembly be given the same authority as the Confession. The obvious purpose was to keep all but Fundamentalists off the church's official boards, and if the proposal had been accepted, it would almost surely have meant more schism in our church; it would certainly have meant a victory for intolerance.

Fortunately, enough of our leaders now saw the danger to our historic tradition of freedom and began circulating what became known as the Auburn Affirmation, in which, while they protested their loyalty to evangelical Christianity and adherence to the Confession of Faith, they denounced this attack. Very soon over 1200 ministers had signed it.

In a showdown with the Fundamentalists, the protesters won. The General Assembly of 1929, in reversing its position, made a

historic decision: General Assemblies do not have the power of defining essentials of faith: this belongs to individual presbyteries; their autonomy in the matter of licensing candidates was upheld.

The defeated party withdrew to form their own splinter group. Harmony in the church was restored. Presbyterianism once more became a church of broadening horizons, truly liberal as well as conservative in its outlook, and with an inclusive spirit.

Previous to this, but part of the same preparation to make our church ready for its ecumenical destiny, had come a revision of the Confession. Demands for it had been mounting over the years as we asked ourselves, "How does such a dogma as predestination fit the missionary belief that God cares for every single creature?" All branches of the family joined in this important work. When revision was completed and accepted by every church body, we once more had that essential unity in the things we believe.

#### A JUST AND DURABLE PEACE

By the turn of the century, Presbyterians were becoming concerned again about social problems. The Social Gospel, presented so persuasively and vigorously by the Baptist minister Walter Rauschenbusch, had its effect on our people, as on all evangelical groups. Presbyterians at no time can forget the prime stress Calvin laid on God's sovereignty over all of life—the individual, the state, society, economic behavior, everything. So the amelioration of poverty, the better distribution of wealth, and the rights of labor were due for attention.

A department of the church was created to work in this area. Mention should also be made of Charles Stelzle, who set up the Labor Temple in New York City, and of Bethany Church in Philadelphia, where ruling elder John Wanamaker, the merchant prince, made an effective mark.

Woodrow Wilson's crusade for the New Freedom, both as Governor of New Jersey and President of the United States, reflected this new social concern. He was, in the fullest sense, a child of the manse, a spiritual descendant of his Scottish Covenanting forebears, a Presbyterian and a Calvinist to the very tips of his stubborn, conscientious, militant fingers.

As world war followed world war, one area of special concern be-

came the discovery and formulation of bases for international peace. Wilson's founding of the League of Nations, abortive as it so largely was, with the United States absent from its ranks, was nonetheless a great landmark in this concerted world effort. Its failure made the success of the next attempt, the United Nations, all the more essential.

During World War II, the Department of International Justice and Goodwill of the Federal Council of Churches established a Special Commission under the chairmanship of a Presbyterian layman, John Foster Dulles, later President Eisenhower's Secretary of State, to work out the principles for a just and durable peace. Their statement, in a document adopted by the Council of Churches in 1942, helped create the necessary support of Christian people for the United Nations.

These are this Commission's "Six Pillars" of the temple of world peace:

"We believe that moral law, no less than physical law, undergirds our world.

"We believe that the sickness and suffering which afflict our present society are proof of indifference to, as well as direct violation of, the moral law.

"We believe that it is contrary to the moral order that nations in their dealings with one another should be motivated by a spirit of revenge and retaliation.

"We believe that the principle of cooperation and mutual concern calls for a true community of nations.

"We believe that economic security is not less essential than political security to a just and durable peace.

"We believe that international machinery is required to accomplish these ends."

#### "A LETTER TO PRESBYTERIANS"

In the early 1950's, a United States Senator, Joseph R. McCarthy, was exploiting our fear of Communism to spread an insidious moral disease among our people which came, appropriately, to be called "McCarthyism." Under the cloak of rooting out subversives, the reputations of innocent persons were being destroyed, their careers wrecked, by false charges and insinuations.

The effect was to set fire to the house of our civil liberties; there was, for a while, real risk that it might be burned down. The paramount need of the day was for some "disturber of government," of the Francis Makemie breed, to step forward and denounce the evil. He appeared, in the person of President John A. Mackay of Princeton Seminary.

At the moment that McCarthyism was rampant and scores of loyal citizens in government, the armed services, the churches and universities, were being smeared with suspicion, "A Letter to Presbyterians Concerning the Present Situation in Our Country and the World" was sent by our church's General Council to all ministers and congregations. In it the menaces of both Communism and McCarthyism were clearly and forcefully exposed. The letter's inspiration was drawn from the biblical truths that have ever inspired Calvinists and Presbyterians in their struggles for social right, and it was enthusiastically endorsed at the next meeting of the General Assembly.

#### THE ECUMENICAL MOVEMENT

Nothing has caused more difficulty in the creation of this world community than the number and rivalry of Protestant sects and denominations, especially in America. As Christianity expanded, this divisiveness has been an increasing source of embarrassment, scandal, and, not seldom, an actual obstacle to the spread of the gospel. But the commonly quoted figure of 250 separate groups conceals the vast amount of real unity, of spirit and co-operative-ness, if not of actual organization, which exists among Protestants. The fact that something like one-third of new Presbyterian ministers, and fully one-half of the new members received in our churches each year, come from other denominations, points to a much greater oneness than we commonly recognize.

The time, however, arrived when it was felt that the unity of Christians must be made explicit, in worship and service as well as institutionally. Out of this feeling grew the ecumenical movement, of which today we hear so much. Its meaning is simple: in concrete, visible ways the Christian church must show the world that it is truly one, truly universal.

By progressive stages both here and abroad, Presbyterians were



among the first to give expression to this feeling. A count of such unions, in one part of the world or another, shows that we have been a party to no fewer than 32.

To name a few principal ones: first, the Cumberlanders rejoined the parent body (1906). Then, in 1925, Presbyterians, Congregationalists, and Methodists in Canada merged to form one United Church. Shortly after that, a still more striking union brought together Anglicans, Methodists, Presbyterians, and Congregationalists in the Church of South India. In this, episcopacy for the first time was adopted as the form of government and our church had the high honor of supplying the first bishop, Lesslie Newbigin. Also in Asia, where the trend away from denominationalism has been particularly strong, we helped to form the United Church of Japan, which is today a strong and vital church, and the United Church of the Philippines.

The World Council of Churches, formally constituted in a meeting at Amsterdam, 1948, has been the principal outgrowth of this movement. At every stage of development, from the World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh in 1910, our church and its leaders have been conspicuous, giving us a right to claim this as an achievement in which our Reformed churches have played a principal part.

At last, ten years ago, Presbyterians thought the time had come to merge their own three denominations in this country—the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, the Presbyterian Church in the United States, which is the “Southern Church,” and the United Presbyterian Church.

In 1954, the General Assemblies of all three churches approved a Plan of Union and sent it down to be voted on by the member presbyteries of each. By overwhelming majorities approval was forthcoming in two; but in the church of the Southland, while all the border synods strongly approved, and numerous people everywhere, the Deep South presbyteries, upset by the recent Supreme Court decision against public school segregation and deeply cherishing their own sectional differences and traditions, were strong enough to defeat the plan.

The other two churches then proceeded to form their own

union, adopting for it the name the "United Presbyterian Church of the United States of America." The hope, however, is still widely held that the day is not far off when the designed union of all three will be an accomplished fact.

#### THE CHURCH IN TODAY'S WORLD

Our world is in a state of flux and upheaval. The church, in trying to serve that world, is having to rethink its whole mission, purpose, life, structure. Revolution is in the air around us.

A moment's thought will tell us that Protestantism no longer occupies the place in America it once did. Dr. Martin Marty, who has chartered this change in a book called *Second Chance for American Protestants*, goes so far as to describe us as "displaced persons." It is unquestionably true that we no longer have the place, the influential status in our communities and nation that we once had.

Questions are being asked that go to the roots of our Protestantism as Presbyterians. What place, for instance, does denominationalism have in today's world?

We have seen how Presbyterianism arose largely through historical accident, being the result of location, culture, language, as well as religious conviction. We are being compelled to consider how far the values and traditions we cherish are truly permanent and universal.

In re-examining our place in American life, we are taking a fresh look at the word "mission." What does it mean? There was a time, as we have seen, when joining a church meant automatically joining in support of its missions, both at home and abroad. But what is today's mission for Presbyterians?

We can begin with a prior question, even tougher: What is a congregation? What purpose does it serve? Does it exist for those *inside*, who believe—or for those *outside*, who don't share our faith?

These are all questions now being discussed. One thing, however, is abundantly clear in the confusion of our times. If there is one place in our nation where we have failed, and failed badly, it is in the city. In the past hundred years or so we have allowed ourselves to become little more than affluent, middle-class suburbanites!

A terrible way to have to think of ourselves, but that is what

most of us are today. For far too long our churches have joined the flight of white-collared (and white-colored) folk from the city to the suburbs of our country, which has been one of the sociological phenomena of our time.

The story is told that a little more than a century ago a shabby, half-starved man, with a child who was dying, drifted into one of the more respectable churches of London. He was obviously down-and-out, and it was quietly suggested to him that perhaps some other church might suit him better. . . . His name was Karl Marx! The story might be called a modern parable.

Today we see more clearly our sin as Christians, and we are making an attempt to wipe it out. Such failure of Christian love *must* be redeemed.

So when our church leaders talk about the church's mission in today's world, they are just as likely to be referring to those urban regions of spiritual wilderness in our land as to foreign countries overseas. To that end they have set up departments of urban work, and many of our more prosperous churches and presbyteries in the suburbs are uniting their efforts to support what are called inner-city churches. There are now larger Protestant parishes for co-operative work in most of our bigger cities—New York, Chicago, Cleveland, St Louis.

This is where our church's pioneering is being done. Today our frontier is at our doorstep.

#### UNFINISHED BUSINESS

There is still a piece of unfinished business in this making of a world community and realizing our ecumenical destiny, and perhaps, because it is so crucial, it is the key piece on which all else now depends: the achievement in our land of full racial freedom and equality for all our citizens.

One thing can be said with certainty. Obviously, there can be no community if, when our brothers of another color come to our country, they are denied hospitality because of their race and color; or if, when they wish to worship with us, they have to go to other churches where persons of their color are admitted, or have to send their children to separate schools.

It is equally certain that unless we have the same all-inclusive fellowship within our own country, we shall not long have it with Christians of other lands. In a word, to complete and make lasting a world community, our church in America has to be color blind. Nothing less than that will do.

A proposed amendment to the form of government of the United Presbyterian Church is now before its people. It reads:

"To belong to a church is to belong to a fellowship which must learn to welcome all persons who would hear of God's mercy in Jesus Christ and desire to share in the worship and service of Christ's church. Each church member must seek the grace for this kind of openness in extending the fellowship of Christ to all such persons in the knowledge that failure to do so on the basis of color, origin, or worldly conditions, constitutes a rejection of Christ himself and causes a scandal to the gospel." The first order of business on becoming Presbyterians is now before us.

#### CONCLUSION

Can this story be summarized? Can our theme, stretching as it does over nearly five centuries, from the age of feudalism to the age of atomic energy, and over so many lands and peoples, be reduced to a single idea, one that will knit together our past with our present, and with our future? What, we cannot help asking ourselves, what have we, as twentieth-century Americans, in common with John Calvin and John Knox, or even with Francis Makemie and John Witherspoon?

There is one word that bridges all these gulfs of time, space, and circumstance, and it is *involvement*.

The men whose deeds have provided our story were all men whose Christian faith and convictions compelled them to become deeply involved in the affairs of their day. They were not neutralists on issues of right and wrong; nor were they isolationists on questions of social justice. Least of all were they pietists who thought they had discharged their Christian duty when they had gone to church, read their Bibles, said their prayers, held the correct beliefs, and done their good deeds. Rather, they were Christians with a mighty *plus* to their church memberships, a *plus* that

plunged them into the whirlpools of politics and social action, with all the risks, dangers, and unpleasantnesses—criticism, misrepresentation, even perhaps, hatred and obloquy—which are the almost inevitable consequence of such involvement.

When they became Presbyterians they enlisted in the service of a Master who clearly expected and demanded this kind of involvement. If it meant undertaking the transforming of the moral character of a city, as it did for Calvin, they set to work to effect that change, though it might mean, as it meant for Calvin, their own crucifixion. If it meant participating in an armed revolt, as it meant for Knox, they took part in, even led, that insurrection. If it meant resisting royal tyranny and defending their freedom, as it did for the Scottish Covenanters, their resistance was unto death. If it meant disobeying a government order, as it did for Makemie, they cheerfully went to jail and stood their trial. If it meant dedicating all that they had, life, fortune, sacred honor, to a cause like independence, they freely and gladly gave their all, as did Witherspoon. If it meant adventuring forth into a trackless wilderness, as it did for the countless men and women who put their courage and their faith to the test in the epic of Western expansion, they heeded the call of the frontier and went.

Involvement means seeing a need and answering a call. It means responsible citizenship. For Presbyterians in the South, in the last century, it meant fighting for public schools in states and regions where they were non-existent and against the opposition of men of wealth and position. For laymen like Woodrow Wilson and John Foster Dulles, in this century, it meant crusading for world peace through international law and justice and organization—a League of Nations or a United Nations.

Today, involvement means standing for racial justice and equality at home. It means helping to build a world community at home and abroad in which all peoples and races can dwell together in dignity as brothers, without fear. And therefore it may mean enlistment in world missions or in the Peace Corps; or it may mean no more than risking unpopularity on a campus and rejection by one's fellows.

These things it *must* mean, because surely as Christians we must

believe that it is God's will that Christ's law of love shall prevail and, so believing, that our own job on earth is to be useful instruments of that purpose.

As Presbyterians we are heirs of a great heritage. It is the responsibility of each one of us to preserve that heritage in our own generation and pass it on with its luster undimmed to those who come after us.

















